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THE
E X C E L L E N C Y
AND
N O B L E N E S S
OF
TRUE RELIGION,

In its ORIGINAL, NATURE, PROPERTYS,
OPERATIONS, PROGRESS, and END.

BY *K.*
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THE
EXCELLENCY AND NOBLENESSE
OF
TRUE RELIGION.

Proverbs 15. 24.

The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.

The Introduction.

IN this whole *book of the Proverbs* we find *Solomon*, one of the eldest sons of wisdom, alwaies standing up and calling her blessed: his heart was both enlarged and fill'd with the pure influences of her beams, and therefore was perpetually adoring that sun which gave him light. *Wisdom is justified of all her children*; though the brats of darknes and children of folly see no beauty nor comeliness in her, that they should desire her, as they said of Christ, *Esay 53. Τῆς συνέσις γένοιτο τοῖς μὴ ἐπαπισμένοις*; That mind which is not touch'd with an inward sense of divine wisdom, cannot estimate the true worth of it. But when wisdom once displays its own excellencies and glories in a purified soul, it is entertained there with the greatest love and delight, and receives its own image reflected back to it self in sweetest returns of love and praise. We have a clear manifestation of this sacred sympathy in *Solomon*, whom we may not unfitly call *Sapientiae Organum*, an instrument which wisdom

2 *The Excellency and Nobleness*

dom herself had tuned to play her divine lessons upon: his words were * *dibrè thephetz*, every where full of divine sweetness matched with strength and beauty, *πολὺν γὰρ ἔχοντες ἔρδον* or, as himself phraseth it, *like apples of gold in pictures of silver*. The mind of a proverb is to utter wisdom in a mystery, as the apostle sometime speaks, and to wrap up divine truth in a kind of ænigmatical way, though in vulgar expressions. Which method of delivering divine doctrine (not to mention the writings of the ancient philosophers) we find frequently pursued in the holy scripture, thereby both opening and hiding at once the truth which is offered to us. A proverb or parable being once unfolded, by reason of its affinity with the phancy, the more sweetly insinuates it self into that, and is from thence with the greater advantage transmitted to the understanding. In this state we are not able to behold truth in its own native beauty and lustre; but while we are vail'd with mortality, truth must vail it self too, that it may the more freely converse with us. S. Austin hath well assign'd the reason why we are so much delighted with metaphors, allegories, &c. because they are so much proportioned to our senses, with which our reason hath contracted an intimacy and familiarity. And therefore God to accommodate his truth to our weak capacities, does as it were embody it in earthly expressions; according to that ancient maxim of the Cabalists, *Lumen supernum nunquam descendit sine indumento*; agreeable to which is that of Dionysius Areop. not seldom quoted by the school-men, *Impossibile est nobis aliter lucere radium divinum,*

* Eccles. 12.

† Prov. 25.

nisi varietate sacrorum velaminum circumvelatum. His words in the Greek are these, * ἐδὲ δυναστὸν ἱερώς ἡμῖν ἐπιλαμβάνει τὴν διαρχικὴν ἀκλίνα, μὴ τῇ ποικιλίᾳ τῶν ἱερῶν παραπλάσμάτων ἀναγωγικῶς περι-
κκαλυμμένην.

Thus much by way of preface or introduction to these words, being one of Solomon's excellent *proverbs*, viz. *The way of life is above to the wise.* Without any mincing or mangling of the words, or running out into any critical curiosities about them, I shall from these words take occasion to set forth *The nobleness and generous spirit of true religion*, which I suppose to be meant here by [*The way of life.*] The word *lemagnaleb* here rendered [*above*] may signify that which is divine and heavenly, high and excellent, as the word ἄνω does in the New Testament, τῆς ἄνω κλήσεως, Phil. 3. 14. τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε, Col. 3. 2. S. *Austin* supposeth the things of religion to be meant by the τὰ ἄνω, *superna*, for this reason, *quod merito excellentiae longè superant res terrenas.* And in this sense I shall consider it, my purpose being from hence to discourse of the excellent and noble spirit of true religion (whether it be taken in abstracto, as it is in itself; or in concreto, as it becomes an inward form and soul to the minds and spirits of good men;) and this in opposition to that low and base-born spirit of irreligion, which is perpetually sinking from God, till it couches to the very centre of misery, *sheol mattah, the lowmost hell.*

In discoursing upon this argument, I shall observe this method; viz. I shall consider the *Excellency and nobleness of True Religion.*

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I. In

* In lib. de Coelest. Hierar. cap. 1.

The Excellency of True Religion

1. In its rise and original.
2. In its nature and essence.
3. In its properties and operations.
4. In its progress.
5. In its term and end.

CHAP. I.

1. The nobleness of religion in regard of its original and fountain: *it comes from heaven and moves towards heaven again. God the first excellency and primitive perfection. All perfections and excellencies in any kind are to be measured by their approach to, and participation of, the First Perfection. Religion the greatest participation of God: none capable of this divine communication but the highest of created beings: and consequently religion is the greatest excellency. A twofold fountain in God whence religion flowes, viz. 1. His nature. 2. His will. Of truth natural and revealed, Of an outward and inward revelation of God's will.*

1. **W**E begin with the first, viz. *True religion is a noble thing in its rise and original, and in regard of its descent. True religion derives its pedigree from heaven, is βλάσημα τῷ ὑπάρει: it comes from heaven, and constantly moves towards heaven again: it's a beam from God, as every good and perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning, as S. James speaks. God is the first truth and primitive goodness: true religion is a vigorous efflux*

efflux and *emanation* of both upon the spirits of men, and therefore is called * *a participation of the divine nature*. Indeed God hath copyed out himself in all created being, having no other pattern to frame any thing by but his own essence; so that all created being is *umbratilis similitudo entis increati*, and is, by some stamp or other of God upon it, at least remotely allied to him: but *true religion* is such a communication of the Divinity, as none but the highest of created beings are capable of. On the other side *sin* and *wickedness* is of the *basest and lowest original*, as being nothing else but a perfect degeneration from God and those *eternal rules of goodness* which are derived from him. Religion is an *heaven-born thing*, *the seed of God* in the spirits of men, whereby they are formed to a similitude and likeness of himself. A true Christian is every way of a most noble extraction, of an heavenly and divine pedigree, being born *ἀνωθεν* from above, as it is expressed *Joh. 3*. The line of all earthly nobility, if it were followed to the beginning, would lead to *Adam*, where all the lines of descent meet in one; and the root of all extractions would be found planted in nothing else but † *Adamah*, red earth: but a Christian derives his line from Christ, who is the only-begotten Son of God, *the shining forth of his glory*, and *the character of his person*, as he is styled *Heb. 1*. We may truly say of Christ and Christians, as *Zeba* and *Zalmunna* said of *Gideon's* brethren, § *As he is, so are they* (according to their capacity,) *each one resembling the children of a king*. Titles of worldly honour in heavens heraldry are but only *Tituli nominales*;

* 2 Pet. 1.

† Gen. 2.

§ Judg. 8.

6 *The Excellency of True Religion*

les; but titles of divine dignity signify some real thing, some real and divine communications to the spirits and minds of men. All perfections and excellencies in any kind are to be measured by their approach to that primitive perfection of all, God himself; and therefore participation of the divine nature cannot but entitle a christian to the highest degree of dignity: *Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God*, 1 Jo. 3. 1.

Thus much for a more general discovery of *the nobleness of religion*, as to its fountain and original; we may further and more *particularly* take notice of this in reference to that *Twofold fountain* in God, from whence all true religion flows and issues forth, viz. 1. *His immutable nature*. 2. *His will*.

1. *The immutable nature of God*. From thence arise all those *eternal rules of truth and goodness* which are the foundation of all religion, and which God at the first creation folded up in the soul of man. These we may call the *truths of natural inscription*; understanding hereby either those *fundamental principles* of truth which reason by a naked intuition may behold in God, or those necessary *corollaries* and *deductions* that may be drawn from thence. I cannot think it so proper to say, that God ought infinitely to be loved because he *commands* it, as because he is indeed an *infinite and unchangeable goodness*. God hath stamp'd a copy of his own archetypal loveliness upon the soul, that man by reflecting into himself might behold there the glory of God, *intra se videre Deum*, see within his soul all those ideas of truth which concern the nature and essence

sence of God, by reason of its own resemblance of God; and so beget within himself the most free and generous motions of love to God. Reason in man being *lumen de lumine*, a light flowing from the Fountain and Father of Lights, and being, as *Tully* phraseth it, *participata similitudo rationis aeternae* (as the law of nature, the νόμος γραπτός, the law written in mans heart, is *participatio legis aeternae in rationali creatura*) it was to enable man to work out of himself all those notions of God which are the true ground-work of love and obedience to God, and conformity to him: and in molding the inward man into the greatest conformity to the nature of God was the perfection and efficacy of the religion of nature. But since mans fall from God, the inward virtue and vigour of reason is much abated, the soul having suffered a ἀλεορρύνσις, as *Plato* speaks, a *defluvium pennarum*: those principles of divine truth which were first ingraven upon mans heart with the finger of God are now, as the characters of some ancient monuments, less clear and legible then at first. And therefore besides the *truth of natural inscription*,

2. God hath provided *the truth of divine revelation*, which issues forth from his own free will, and clearly discovers the way of our return to God, from whom we are fallen. And this truth, with the effects and productions of it in the minds of men, the scripture is wont to set forth under the name of *grace*, as proceeding merely from the free bounty and overflowings of the divine love. Of this revealed will is that of the apostle to be understood, † τὰ τῆ Θεοῦ εἰς ὁδὸν, *None hath known*

† 1 Cor. 2. 11.

8 *The Excellency of True Religion*

known the things of God; &c., none, neither angel nor man, could know the mind of God, could unlock the breast of God, or search out the counsels of his will. But God out of the infinite riches of his compassions toward mankind is pleas'd to unbosom his secrets, and most clearly to manifest * *the way into the holiest of all, and bring to light life and immortality*, and in these last ages to send his Son, who lay in his bosom from all eternity, to teach us his will and declare his mind to us. When we look unto the earth, then behold darkness and dimness of anguish, that I may use those words of the prophet *Esay*: but when we look towards heaven, then behold light breaking forth upon us, like the eye-lids of the morning, and spreading its wings over the horizon of mankind sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

But besides this outward revelation of God's will to men, there is also an inward impression of it on their minds and spirits, which is in a more special manner attributed to God. We cannot see divine things but in a divine light: God only, who is the true light, and in whom there is no darkness at all, can so shine out of himself upon our glassy understandings, as to beget in them a picture of himself, his own will and pleasure, and turn the soul (as the phrase is in *Job* 38.) *chebomer botham*, like wax or clay to the seal of his own light and love. He that made our souls in his own image and likeness, can easily find a way into them. The word that God speaks having found a way into the soul, imprints it self there as with the point of a diamond, and becomes λόγος ἑγγε-
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* Heb. 9. 2 Tim. 1.

γραμματικός ἐν τῇ τῷ μανθάνοντι ψυχῇ, that I may borrow Plato's expression. Men may teach the *grammar* and *rhetorick*, but God teaches the *divinity*. Thus it is God alone that acquaints the soul with the *truths of revelation*: and he also it is that does strengthen and raise the soul to better apprehensions even of *natural truth*: God being that in the *intellectual* world which the sun is in the sensible, (ὅπερ ἐν τοῖς ἀσθητοῖς ὁ ἥλιος, τῷ ἐν τοῖς νοητοῖς ὁ Θεός) as some of the ancient fathers love to speak, and the ancient philosophers too, who meant God by their *intellectus agens*, whose proper work they supposed to be not so much to enlighten the *object*, as the *faculty*.

C H A P. II.

2. The nobleness of religion in respect of its nature, *briefly discovered in some particulars.* How a man actuated by religion 1. *lives above the world*; 2. *converses with himself*, and knows how to love, value and reverence himself, in the best sense; 3. *lives above himself*, not being content to enjoy himself, except he may enjoy God too, and himself in God. How he denies himself for God. To deny a man's self, is not to deny right reason, for that were to deny God, instead of denying himself for God. Self-love the only principle that acts wicked men. The happy privileges of a soul united to God.

2. **W**E have done with the first head, and come now to discourse with the like brevity on another (our purpose being to insist
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most upon the third particular, viz. *The nobleness of religion in its properties*, after we have handled the second) which is *The excellency and nobleness of religion in regard of its nature*, whether it be taken *in abstracto* or *in concreto*; which we shall treat of promiscuously, without any rigid tying of our selves to exact rules of art: and so we shall glance at it in these following notions, rising as it were step by step.

I. *A good man, that is actuated by religion, lives above the world and all mundane delights and excellencies.* The soul is a more vigorous and puissant thing, when it is once restored to the possession of its own being, than to be bounded within the narrow sphere of mortality, or to be streightned within the narrow prison of sensual and corporeal delights; but it will break forth with the greatest vehemency, and ascend upwards towards immortality: and when it converses more intimately with religion, it can scarce look back upon its own converses (though in a lawfull way) with earthly things, without a being touch'd with an *holy shame-fac'dness* and a *modest blushing*; and as *Porphyrus* speaks of *Plotinus*, *ἐν αὐτῷ μὲν αἰχνομορῶ ὅτι ἐν σώματι εἶναι*, it seems to be ashamed that it should be in the body. It is only true religion that teaches and enables men to dye to this world and to all earthly things, and to rise above the vaporous sphere of sensual and earthly pleasures, which darken the mind and hinder it from enjoying the brightness of divine light; the proper motion of religion is still upwards to its first original. Whereas on the contrary the souls of wicked men *ὑποβρυχίας, συμπεριφέρονται* as *Plato* somewhere speaks, being moistned with the exu-

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dations of their sensual parts become heavy and sink down into earthly things, and couch as near as may be to the centre. Wicked men bury their souls in their bodies: all their projects and designs are bounded within the compass of this earth which they tread upon. The fleshly mind never minds any thing but flesh, and never rises above the outward matter, but alwaies creeps up and down like shadows upon the surface of the earth: and if it begins at any time to make any faint assays upwards, it presently finds it self laden with a weight of sensuality which draws it down again. It was the opinion of the *Academicks* that the souls of wicked men after their death could not of a long season depart from the graves and sepulchers where their mates were buried; but there wandred up and down in a desolate manner, as not being able to leave those bodies which they were so much wadded to in this life.

2. *A good man, one that is actuated by religion, lives in converse with his own reason; he lives at the height of his own being.* This a great philosopher makes the property of a good man, *μόνος ὁ τὴν ἀρετὴν ἔχων ἐαυτῷ συγγινεσθαι δύναται, καὶ τίρσκειν ἐαυτόν* he knows how to converse with himself, and truely to love and value himself: he measures not himself, like the epicure, by his inferior and earthly part, but by an immortal essence and that of him which is from above; and so does *ἐπὶ τὴν ἐν ἐαυτῷ ἀρχὴν ἀναβαίνειν*, climbe up to the height of that immortal principle which is within him. The *Stoicks* thought no man a fit auditor of their *ethicks*, till he were dispossess'd of that opinion, that man was nothing but *ὅμοιος*

πλοκή ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος, as professing to teach men how to live only κατὰ λόγον, as they speak. Perhaps their divinity was in some things too rigid; but I am sure a good man acts the best of this their doctrine in the best sense, and knows better how to *reverence himself*, without any self-flattery or admiration, then ever any *Stoick* did. He principally looks upon himself, * as being what he is rather by *his soul* than by *his body*: he values himself by *his soul*, that being which hath the greatest affinity with God; and so does not seek himself in the *fading vanities* of this life, nor in those poor and *low delights* of his *senses*, as wicked men do; but as the philosopher doth well express it, ὅση δύναμις φέγειν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος βέλεται, καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν σωματικῶν παθῶν εἰς ἑαυτὸν συνάδει, and when the soul thus retires into it self, and views its own worth and excellency, it presently finds a chaste and virgin-love stirr'd up within it self towards it self, and is from within the more excited and obliged εἰς τὴν φυλακὴν τοῦ οἰκεῖν ἀξιώματος, as *Simplicius* speaks, to mind the preserving of its own dignity and glory. To conclude this particular, a good man endeavours to walk by eternal and unchangeable rules of reason; *reason* in a good man sits in the throne, and governs all the powers of his soul in a sweet harmony and agreement with it self: whereas wicked men live only ζῶν δοξαστικῇ, being led up and down by the foolish fires of their own sensual apprehensions. In wicked men there is a *democracy* of wild *lusts* and *passions*, which violently hurry the soul up and down with restless motions. All sin and wickedness is σάσις καὶ ὕβρις τῆς ψυχῆς,

* κατὰ τὴν λογικὴν ζῶν ὑσιονόμος, *Simplic. in Epist.*

a sedition stirred up in the soul by the sensitive powers against reason. It was one of the great evils that Solomon saw under the sun, **servants on horseback, and princes going as servants upon the ground*. We may find the moral of it in every wicked man, whose souls are only as *servants* to wait upon their *senses*. In all such men the whole course of nature is turned up side down, and the cardinal points of motion in this little world are changed to contrary positions: but the motions of a good man are methodical, regular and concentric to reason. It's a fond imagination that religion should extinguish reason; when as religion makes it more illustrious and vigorous; and they that live most in the exercise of *religion*, shall find their *reason* most enlarged. I might add, that *reason* in relation to the capacitating of man for converse with God was thought by some to be the *formal difference* of man. *Plutarch* after a large debate whether *brutes* had not *reason* in them as well as *man*, concludes it negatively upon this ground, because they had no knowledge and sense of the deity, οὐκ ἐκ ἐγγύρεται Θεῷ νόησις. In *Tully's* account this *capableness of religion* seem'd to be nothing different from *rationality*, and therefore he doubts not to give this for the most proper characterism of *reason*, that it is *vinculum Dei et hominis*. And so with them (not to name others of the same apprehensions) *animal rationale* and *animal capax religionis* seem'd to be of the like importance; *reason* as enabling and fitting man to converse with God by knowing him and loving him, being a character most unquestionably differencing man from brute creatures.

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* Eccles. 10.

14 The Excellency of True Religion

3. A good man, one that is informed by true religion, lives above himself, and is raised to an intimate converse with the divinity. He moves in a larger sphere than his own being, and cannot be content to enjoy himself, except he may enjoy God too, and himself in God.

This we shall consider two ways.

1. In the *self-denial* of good men; they are content and ready to deny themselves for God. I mean not that they should deny their own reason, as some would have it; for that were to deny a beam of divine light, and so to deny God, instead of denying ourselves for him. It is better resolved by some philosophers in this point, that *ἰταδαι λόγῳ* to follow reason is *ἰταδαι Θεῷ* to follow God; and again, *Ἀβυσσὸς δὲ ἐφθάρη πείνιδαι ἢ Θεῷ, ταυτὸν ἐστὶ*. But by *self-denial* I mean, the soul's quitting all its own interest in it self, and an intire resignation of it self to him as to all points of service and duty: and thus the soul loves it self in God, and lives in the possession not so much of its own being as of the divinity; desiring only to be great in God, to glory in his light, and spread it self in his fulness; to be fill'd always by him, and to empty it self again into him; to receive all from him, and to expend all for him; and so to live not as its own, but as God's. The highest ambition of a good man is to serve the will of God: he takes no pleasure in himself nor in any thing within himself further then he sees a stamp of God upon it. Whereas wicked men are imprisoned within the narrow circumference of their own beings, and perpetually frozen into a cold *self-love* which binds up all the innate vigour of their souls, that it cannot break forth

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or express it self in any noble way. The soul in which religion rules, says as *S. Paul* did, *I live; and yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.* On the contrary, a wicked man swells in his own thoughts, and pleaseth himself more or less with the imagination of a *self-sufficiency*. The *Stoicks*, seeing they could not raise themselves up to God, endeavour to bring down God to their own model, imagining the deity to be nothing else but some greater kind of *animal*, and a wise man to be almost one of his * peers. And this is more or less the genius of wicked men, they will be something in themselves, they wrap up themselves in their own being, move up and down in a sphere of *self-love*, live a professed independency upon God, and maintain a *meum et tuum* between God and themselves. It's the character only of a good man to be able to deny and disown himself, and to make a full surrender of himself unto God; forgetting himself, and minding nothing but the will of his Creator; triumphing in nothing more than in his own *nothingness*, and in the *allness* of the divinity. But indeed this his being nothing is the only way to be all things; this his having nothing the truest way of possessing all things.

2. As a good man lives *above himself*, in a way of *self-denial*, so he lives also above himself as he lives in the *enjoyment of God*: and this is the very soul and essence of true religion, to unite the soul in the nearest intimacy and conjunction with God, who is *πρὸς θεόν, πρὸς εὐ, πρὸς ψυχῆς*, as *Plotinus* speaks. Then indeed the soul lives *most nobly*, when it feels it self to live and move

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* *Sapiens cum diis ex pari vivit, decorum socius, non supplex, Sen. in Ep. 31. and 52.*

and have its being in God; which though the law of nature makes the common condition of all created being, yet it is only true religion that can give us a more feeling and comfortable sense of it. God is not present to wicked men, when his almighty essence supports them and maintains them in being; * ἀλλ' ἐστὶ τῷ δυναμῶν διγενὶ παρὸν, *but he is present to him that can touch him*, hath an inward feeling knowledge of God and is intimately united to him; τῷ δὲ ἀδυνατῶντι ἔπαρσι, *but to him that cannot thus touch him he is not present*.

Religion is life and spirit, which flowing out from God who is that *Αὐτοζων* that hath life in himself, returns to him again as into its own original, carrying the souls of good men up with it. The spirit of religion is alwaies ascending upwards, and spreading itself through the whole essence of the soul, loosens it from a self-confinement and narrowness, and so renders it more capacious of divine enjoyment. God envies not his people any good, but being infinitely bountiful is pleased to impart himself to them in this life, so far as they are capable of his communications: they stay not for all their happiness till they come to heaven. Religion alwaies carries its reward along with it, and when it acts most vigorously upon the mind and spirit of man, it then most of all fills it with an inward sense of divine sweetness. To conclude, *to walk with God* is in scripture made the character of a good man, and it's the highest perfection and privilege of created nature to converse with the divinity. Whereas on the contrary wicked men converse with nothing but their

* Plotin. in En. 6. l. 9. c. 7.

their *lusts* and the *vanities* of this fading life, which here flatter them for a while with unhallowed delights and a mere shadow of contentment; and when these are gone, they find both *substance* and *shadow* too to be lost eternally. But true goodness brings in a constant revenue of solid and substantial satisfaction to the spirit of a good man, delighting alwaies to sit by those eternal springs that feed and maintain it: the spirit of a good man (as it is well expressed by the philosopher) ἀκίετως ἐνδεύσας ἐν τῇ ὕδατι τῆς θείας ἀγαθότητος, and is always drinking in fountain goodness, and fills it self more and more, till it be filled with all the fulness of God.

C H A P. III.

3. The nobleness of religion in regard of its properties, &c. of which this is one, i. Religion enlarges all the faculties of the soul, and begets a true ingenuity, liberty and amplitude, the most free and generous spirit in the minds of good men. *The nearer any being comes to God, the more large and free; the further it slides from God, the more streightned. Sin is the sinking of mans soul from God into sensual selfishness. An account when the most generous freedom of the soul is to be taken in its just proportions. How mechanical and formal Christians make an art of religion, set it such bounds as may not exceed the scant measure of their principles; and then fit their own notions as so many examples to it. A good man finds not his religion without him, but as a living principle within him. God's immuta-*

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ble and eternal goodness the unchangeable rule of his will. Peevish, self-will'd and imperious men shape out such notions of God as are agreeable to this pattern of themselves. The truly religious have better apprehensions of God.

HAVING discoursed *the nobleness of religion* in its original and nature; we come now to consider the *excellency of religion* in its properties, its proper effects and vital operations. In treating of this third particular we shall, (as formerly we have done) without tying ourselves precisely to any strict rules of art and method, confound the notions of religion *in abstracto* and *in concreto* together, handling them promiscuously. As religion is a noble thing, 1. in respect of its original, 2. in respect of its nature; so also 3. in respect of its properties and effects.

1. The first property and effect of true religion whereby it expresseth its own nobleness is this, *That it widens and enlarges all the faculties of the soul, and begets a true ingenuity, liberty and amplitude, the most free and generous spirit, in the minds of good men.* Those in whom religion rules are *bene horim*, there is a true generous spirit within them, which shews the nobleness of their extraction. The Jewes have a good maxim to this purpose, *ein ben horin alle mi shegnossek be torah*, * None truly noble, but he that applies himself to religion and a faithful observance of the divine law. Tully could see so much in his natural philosophy as made him say, *Scientia naturae ampliatur animus, et ad divina attollit*: but this is most true of religion,

† Pirke Avoth cap. 6.

on, that in an higher sense it does work the soul into a true and divine *amplitude*. There is a living soul of religion in good men which, spreading it self through all their faculties, spirits all the wheels of motion, and enables them to dilate and extend themselves more fully upon God and all divine things, without being pinched or streightened within themselves. Whereas wicked men are of most *narrow* and *confined* spirits, they are so contracted by the *pinching particularities* of earthly and created things, so imprisoned in a dark dungeon of *sensuality* and *selfishness*, so streightened through their carnal designs and ends, that they cannot stretch themselves nor look beyond the horizon of *time* and *sense*.

The nearer any being comes to God, who is that infinite fullness that fills all in all, the more *vast* and *large* and *unbounded* it is; as the further it slides from him, the more it is *streightened* and *confined*; as *Plato* hath long since concluded concerning the condition of sensual men, that they live *ὡς πέσκιον*, like a *shell-fish*, and can never move up and down but in their own prison, which they ever carry about with them. Were I to define *sin*, I would call it *the sinking of a mans soul from God into a sensual selfishness*. All the freedom that wicked men have, is but (like that of banished men) to wander up and down in the wilderness of this world from one den and cave to another.

The more high and *noble* any being is, so much the *deeper radication* have all its *innate virtues* and properties within it, and are by so much the *more universal* in their issues and actings upon other things: and such an inward living principle of virtue and activity further heightened and u-

nited and informed with *light* and *truth*, we may call *liberty*. Of this truly-noble and divine liberty religion is the mother and nurse, leading the soul to God, and so impregnating that inward vitall principle of *activity* and *vigour* that is embosom'd in it, that it is able without any inward disturbance and resistance from any controlling lusts to exercise it self, and act with the greatest complacency in the most full and ample manner upon that *first, universal* and *unbounded* essence which is God himself. The most generous freedom can never be took in its full and just dimensions and proportion, but then when all the powers of the soul exercise and spend themselves in the most large and ample manner upon the infinite and essential goodness, as upon their own most proper object. If we should ask a good man, when he finds himself best at ease, when he finds himself most free; his answer would be, when he is under the most powerfull constraints of divine love. There are a sort of *mechanical* Christians in the world, that not finding *religion* acting like a *living form* within them, satisfy themselves only to make an *art* of it, and rather *inform* and *actuate it*, then are *informed by it*; and setting it such bounds and limits as may not exceed the short and scant measures of their own home-born principles, then they endeavour to fit the notions of their own minds as so many *examples* to it: and it being a circle of their own making, they can either amplify or contract it accordingly as they can force their own minds and dispositions to agree and suit with it. But true religion indeed is no *art*, but an *inward nature* that contains all the laws and measures of its motion

tion within itself. A good man finds not his religion without him, but as a living principle within him; and all his faculties are still endeavouring to unite themselves more and more in the nearest intimacy with it as with their proper perfection. There is that amiableness in religion, that strong sympathy between the soul and it, that it needs carry no testimonials or commendations along with it. If it could be supposed that God should plant a religion in the soul that had no affinity or alliance with it, it would grow there but as a strange slip. But God when he gives his laws to men, does not by virtue of his *absolute dominion* dictate any thing at randome, and in such an arbitrary way as some imagine; but he measures all by his own eternal goodness. Had God himself been any thing else then the *first and greatest good* of man, then to have loved him with the full strength of all our faculties should not have been the *first and greatest commandment*, as our Saviour tells us it is. Some are apt to look upon God as some *peevish* and *self-will'd* thing, because themselves are such: and seeing that their own absolute and naked *wills* are for the most part the rules of all their actions and the impositions which they lay upon others; they think that heaven's monarchy is such an arbitrary thing too, as being govern'd by nothing else but by an *almighty absolute will*. But the soul that is acquainted most intimately with the *Divine Will*, would more certainly resolve us, that God's *unchangeable goodness* (which makes the divinity an uniform thing and to settle together upon its own centre, as I may speak with reverence) is also the *unchangeable rule*

rule of his will; neither can he anymore swerve from it, then he can swerve from himself. Nor does he charge any duty upon man without consulting first of all with his goodness: which being the original and adequate object of a good man's will and affections, it must needs be that all the issues and effluxes of it be entertain'd with an answerable complacency and chearfulness. This is the hinge upon which all true religion turns, the proper centre about which it moves; which taking a fast and sure hold of an innate and correspondent principle in the soul of man, raiseth it up above the confines of mortality, and in the day of its mighty power makes it become a free-will-offering unto God.

CHAP. IV.

The second property discovering the nobleness of religion, viz. That it restores man to a just power and dominion over himself, enables him to overcome his self-will and passions. Of self-will, and the many evils that flow from it. That religion does no where discover its power and prowess so much, as in subduing this dangerous and potent enemy. The highest and noblest victories are those over our self-will and passions. Of self-denial, and the having power over our will; the happiness and the privileges of such a state. How that magnanimity and puissance which religion begets in holy souls differs from and excells that galantry and puissance which the great Nimrods of this world boast of.

2. **T**HE second property or effect of religion, whereby it discovers its own nobleness

ness (and it is somewhat a-kine to the former particular, and will help further to illustrate and enforce it) is this, *that it restores a good man to a just power and dominion over himself and his own will, enables him to overcome himself, his own self-will and passions, and to command himself and all his powers for God.* 'Tis only religion that restores that *αὐτοκρατορία* which the Stoical philosophy so impotently pretended to; it is this only that enthrones man's deposed reason, and establisheth within him a just empire over all those blind powers and passions which so impetuously rend a man from the possession and enjoyment of himself. Those turbulent and unruly, uncertain and unconstant motions of *passion* and *self-will* that dwell in degenerate minds, *divide* them perpetually from themselves, and are alwaies molding several factions and tumultuous combinations within them against the dominion of *reason*. And the only way to *unite* man firmly to himself is by uniting him to God, and establishing in him a firm amity and agreement with the first and primitive being.

There is nothing in the world so boisterous as a man's own *self-will*, which is never guided by any fixt or steady rules, but is perpetually hurried to and fro by a blind and furious *impetus* of *pride* and *passions* issuing from within it self. This is the true source and spring of all that *envy*, *malice*, *bitterness of spirit*, *male-contentedness* and *impatience*, of all those *black and dark passions*, those *inordinate desires and lusts*, that reign in the hearts and lives of wicked men. A man's own *self-will* throws him out of all true enjoyment of his own being: therefore it was

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24 *The Excellency of True Religion*

our Saviours counsel to his disciples, *in patience possess your souls*. We may say of that *self-will* which is lodged in the heart of a wicked man, as the Jews speak of the *Feizer haragn segmentum malum* so often mention'd in their writings, that it is *sar hammaveth*, the prince of death and darkness which is at continual enmity with heaven, and *zohama hannahash*, the filthiness and poison of the serpent. This is the seed of the evil spirit which is perpetually at enmity with the seed of God and the heaven born nature: its design and scope is with a giant-like pride to climb up into the throne of the almighty, and to establish an unbounded tyranny in contradiction to the will of God, which is nothing else but the issue and efflux of his eternal and unbounded goodness. This is the very heart of the old *Adam* that is within men. This is the hellish spirit of *self-will*: it would solely prescribe laws to all things; it would fain be the source and fountain of all affairs and events; it would judge all things at its own tribunal. They in whose spirits this principle rules, would have their own fancies and opinions, their perverse and boisterous wills to be the just square and measure of all good and evil; these are the plumb-lines they apply to all things to find out their *rectitude* or *obliquity*. He that will not submit himself to nor comply with the *eternal and uncreated will*, but instead of it endeavours to set up his own will, makes himself *the most real idol* in the world, and exalts himself against all that is called God and ought to be worshipp'd. To worship a graven image, or to make cakes and burn incense to the queen of heaven, is not a worse idolatry than it is for a man to set up *self-*

self-will, to devote himself to the serving of it, and to give up himself to a compliance with his own will as contrary to the divine and eternal will. When God made the world, he did not make it merely for the exercise of his almighty power, and then throw it out of his hands, and leave it alone to subsist by it self as a thing that had no further relation to him: but he derived himself through the whole creation, so gathering and knitting up all the several pieces of it again; that as the first production and the continued subsistence of all things is from himself, so the ultimate resolution and tendency of all things might be to him. Now that which first endeavoured a divorce between God and his creation, and to make a conquest of it, was that diabolical *arrogancy* and *self-will* that crept up and wound it self serpent-like into apostate minds and spirits. This is the true strain of that hellish nature, to live independently of God, and to derive the *principles* from *another beginning*, and carry on the line of all motions and operations to *another end*, then God himself, by whom and to whom and for whom all things subsist.

From what hath been said concerning this powerful and dangerous enemy that wars against our souls and the divine will, may the excellency and noble spirit of true religion appear, in that it tames the impetuoufness and turbulency of this *self-will*. Then indeed does religion perform the highest and bravest conquests, then does it display the greatness of its strength and the excellency of its power, when it overcomes this great *Arimanius*, that hath so firmly seated himself in

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very centre of the soul. **mi gibbor, who is the man of courage and valour? hakkobash eth jizro, it is he that subdues his concupiscence, his own will; it is a Jewish maxim attributed to Ben Zoma, and a most undoubted truth. This was the grand lesson that our great Lord and Master came to teach us, viz. to deny our own wils; neither was there any thing that he endeavor'd more to promote by his own example, as he tells us of himself, † I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me; and again, ‡ Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God, § yea thy law is within my heart: and in his greatest agonies, with a clear and chearfull submission to the divine will, he often repeats it, †† Not my will, but thy will be done: and so he hath taught us to pray and so to live. This indeed is the true life and spirit of religion, this is religion in its meridian altitude, its just dimensions. A true Christian that hath power over his own will, may live nobly and happily, and enjoy a perpetually-clear heaven within the serenity of his own mind. When the sea of this world is most rough and tempestuous about him, then can he ride safely at anchor within the haven, by a sweet compliance of his will with God's will. He can look about him, and with an even and indifferent mind behold the world either to smile or frown upon him; neither will he abate of the least of his contentment, for all the ill and unkind usage he meets with all in this life. He that hath got the mastery over his own will, feels no violence from without, finds*

* *Pirke Avoth* cap. 4.
§ *Hebr.* 10.

† *Job.* 6. 38.

‡ *Psal.* 40.

†† *Luke* 22. *Mark* 14. 36.

no contests within; and like a strong man, keeping his house, he preserves all his goods in safety: and when God calls for him out of this state of mortality, he finds in himself a power to lay down his own life; neither is it so much taken from him, as quietly and freely surrendered up by him. This is the highest piece of prowess, the noblest achievement, by which a man becomes lord over himself, and the master of his own thoughts, motions and purposes. This is the royal prerogative, the high dignity conferred upon good men by our Lord and Saviour, whereby they overcoming this both his and their enemy, their *self-will* and *passions*, are enabled to sit down with him in his throne, as he overcoming in another way, is set down with his Father in his throne; as the phrase is *Rev. 3.*

Religion begets the most *heroick, free and generous motions* in the minds of good men. There is no where so much of a truly magnanimous and raised spirit as in those who are best acquainted with the power of religion. Other men are slaves and captives to one vanity or other: but the truly religious is above them all, and able to command himself and all his powers for God. That *bravery* and *gallaniness* which seems to be in the great *Nimrods* of this world is nothing else but the *swelling* of their own unbounded *pride* and *vain-glory*. It hath been observed of the greatest monarchs of the world, that in midst of their *triumphs* they themselves have been led *captives* to one *vice* or another. All the *gallantry* and *puissance* which the bravest spirits of the world boast of, is but a poor *confined* thing, and extends its self only to some *particular* cases and

circumstances: but the *valour* and *puissance* of a soul impregnated by religion hath in a sort an *universal* extent, as *S. Paul* speaks of himself, *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*; it is not determined to this or that particular object or time or place, but *πάντα* all things whatsoever belong to a creature fall under the level thereof. Religion is by *S. Paul* described to be *πνεῦμα δυνάμεως* the *spirit of power* in opposition to the *spirit of fear*, 2 Tim. 1. as all *sin* is by *Simplicius* wel described to be *ἀδυναμία* *impotency* and *weakness*. Sin by its deadly infusions into the soul of man waists and eats out the innate vigour of the soul, and casts it into such a deep lethargy, as that it is not able to recover it self: but religion, like that *balsamum vitae*, being once conveyed into the soul, awakens and enlivens it, and makes it renew its strength like an eagle, and mount strongly upwards towards heaven; and so uniting the soul to God, the centre of life and strength, it renders it undaunted and invincible. Who can tell the inward life and vigour that the soul may be filled with, when once it is in conjunction with an almighty essence? There is a latent and hidden virtue in the soul of man which then begins to discover it self when the divine spirit spreads forth its influences upon it. Every thing the more spiritual it is, and the higher and nobler it is in its being, the more active and vigorous it is; as the more any thing falls and sinks into *matter*, the more dull and sluggish and unwieldy it is. The *Platonists* were wont to call all things that participated most of *matter* ὅντως μὴ ὄντα: now nothing doeth more purifie, more sublimiate and exalt the soul then religion, when the soul suffers
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God to sit within it as a refiner and purifier of silver, and when it abides the day of his coming; for he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers sope, Mal. 3. Thus the soul being purified and spiritualiz'd, and changed more and more into the glorious image of God, is able to do all things, out of weakness is made strong, gives proof of its divine vigour and activity, and shews it self to be a noble and puissant spirit, such as God did at first create it.

C H A P. V.

The third property or effect discovering the nobleness of religion, viz. that it directs and enables a man to propound to himself the best end, viz. the glory of God, and his own becoming like unto God. Low and particular ends and interests both debase and streighten a mans spirit: the universal, highest and last end both ennobles and enlarges it. A man is such as the end is he aims at. The great power the end hath to mold and fashion man into its likeness. Religion obliges a man (not to seek himself, nor to drive a trade for himself; but) to seek the glory of God, to live wholly to him; and guides him steddily and uniformly to the one chief good and last end. Men are prone to flatter themselves with a pretended aiming at the glory of God. A more full and distinct explication of what is meant by a mans directing all his actions to the glory of God. What it is truly and really to glorifie God. God's seeking his glory in respect of us is the flowing forth of his goodness upon us: our seeking the glory of God is
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our endeavouring to partake more of God, and to resemble him (as much as we can) in true holiness and every divine virtue. That we are not nicely to distinguish between the glory of God and our own salvation. That salvation is nothing else for the main but a true participation of the divine nature. To love God above our selves, is not to love him above the salvation of our souls; but above our particular beings and above our sinfull affections, &c. The difference between things that are good relatively and those that are good absolutely and essentially: that in our conformity to these God is most glorified, and we are made most happy.

3. **T**HE third property or effect whereby religion discovers its own excellency, is this, that it directs and enables a man to propound to himself the best end and scope of life, viz. The glory of God the highest being, and his own assimilation or becoming like unto God.

That Christian in whom religion rules powerfully, is not so low in his ambitions as to pursue any of the things of this world as his *ultimate end*: his soul is too big for earthly designs and interests; but understanding himself to come from God, he is continually returning to him again. It is not worth the while for the mind of man to pursue any perfection lower then its own, or to aim at any *end* more ignoble then it self is. There is nothing that more *streightens* and *confines* the free-born soul then the *particularity*, *indigency* and *penury* of that *end* which it pursues: when it complies most of all with this lower world, τότε μάλιστα τὸ αὐτεξέσσιον ἀμφισβητήσιμον ἔχει, as is well obser-

observed by an excellent philosopher, the true *nobleness* and *freedom* of it is then *most disputable*, and the title it holds to true *liberty* becomes most litigious. It never more slides and degenerates from it self, then when it becomes enthralled to some *particular interest*: as on the other side it never acts more *freely* or *fully*, then when it extends it self upon the most *universal end*. Every thing is so much the more noble, *quò longiores habet fines*, as was well observ'd by *Tully*. As *low ends* *debase* a mans spirit, supplant and rob it of its birth-right; so the *highest* and *last end* raises and *ennobles* it, and *enlarges* it into a more universal and comprehensive capacity of enjoying that one unbounded goodness which is God himself: it makes it spread and dilate it self in the infinite sphere of the divine being and blessedness, it makes it live in the fulness of him that fills all in all.

Every thing is most properly such as the *end* is which is aim'd at: the mind of man is alwaies shaping it self into a conformity as much as may be to that which is his *end*; and the nearer it draws to it in the atchievement thereof, the greater likeness it bears to it. There is a plastick virtue, a secret energy issuing forth from that which the mind propounds to it self as its *end*, to mold and fashion it according to its own model. The soul is alwaies stamp'd with the same characters that are engraven upon the *end* it aims at; and while it converses with it, and sets it self before it, it is *turned as wax to the seal*, to use that phrase in *Job*. Man's soul conceives all its thoughts and imaginations before his *end*, as

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* *Laban's ewes did their young before the rods in the watering troughs. He that pursues any worldly interest or earthly thing as his end, becomes himself also *yeſſing earthly*: and the more the soul directs it self to God, the more it becomes *deſſing God-like*, deriving a print of that glory and beauty upon it self which it converseth with, as it is excellently set forth by the apostle, † *But we all with open face, behold as in a glass the glory of the lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory. That spirit of ambition and popularity that so violently transports the minds of men into a pursuit of vain-glory, makes them as vain as that popular air they live upon: the spirit of this world that draws forth a mans designs after worldly interests, makes him as unstable, unconstant, tumultuous and perplex'd a thing as the world is. On the contrary, the spirit of true religion steering and directing the mind and life to God, makes it an uniform, stable and quiet thing, as God himself is: it is only true goodness in the soul of man guiding it steddily and uniformly towards God, directing it and all its actions to the one last end and chief good, that can give it a true consistency and composedness within it self.**

All self-seeking and self-love do but imprison the soul, and confine it to its own home: the mind of a good man is too noble, too big for such a particular life; he hath learn'd to despise his own being in comparison of that uncreated beauty and goodness which is so infinitely transcendent to himself or any created thing; he reckons upon his choice and best affections and designs as too choice and precious a treasure to be spent upon such

* Gen. 30. † 2 Cor. 3.

such a poor sorry thing as himself, or upon any thing else but God himself.

This was the life of Christ, and is in some degree the life of every one that partakes of the spirit of Christ. Such Christians seek not their own glory, but the glory of him that sent them into this world: they know they were brought forth into this world, not to set up or drive a trade for themselves, but to serve the will and pleasure of him that made them, and to finish that work he hath appointed them. It were not worth the while to have been born or to live, had it been only for such a *penurious end* as our selves are: it is most God-like and best suits with the spirit of religion, for a Christian to live wholly to God, to live the life of God, *having his own life hid with Christ in God*; and thus in a sober sense he becomes *deified*. This indeed is such a *Θείωσις deification* as is not transacted merely upon the stage of *fancy* by arrogance and presumption, but in the highest powers of the soul by a living and quickning spirit of true religion there uniting God and the soul together in *the unity of affections, will and end*.

I should now pass from this to another particular; but because many are apt to misapprehend the notion of *God's glory*, and flatter themselves with their pretended and imaginary *aiming at the glory of God*, I think it may be of good use, a little further and more distinctly to unfold *the designe* that a religious mind drives on *in directing it self and all its actions to God*. We are therefore to consider, that this doth not consist in some *transient* thoughts of God and his *glory* as the *end* we propound to our selves in any undertakings:

dertakings: a man does not direct all his actions to *the glory of God* by forming a conception in his mind, or stirring up a strong imagination upon any action, That that must be *for the glory of God*: it is not the thinking of God's glory that is *glorifying* of him. As all other parts of religion may be *apishly* acted over by *fancy* and *imagination*, so also may the internal parts of religion many times be acted over with much seeming grace by our *fancy and passions*; these often love to be drawing the pictures of religion, and use their best arts to render them more beautifull and pleasing. But though true practical religion derives its force and beauty through all *the lower powers* of a mans soul, yet it hath not its rise nor throne there: as religion consists not in a *form of words* which signifie nothing, so neither doth it consist in a *set of fancies* or *internal apprehensions*. Our *Saviour hath best taught what it is to live to God's glory, or to glorifie God, viz. To be fruitfull in all holiness, and to live so as that our lives may shine with his grace spreading it self through our whole man.

We rather *glorifie* God by entertaining the impressions of his glory upon us, then by communicating any kind of glory to him. Then does a good man become the tabernacle of God wherein the divine *Shechinah* does rest, and which the divine glory fills, when the frame of his mind and life is wholly according to that idea and † pattern which he receives from the mount. We best glorifie him when we grow most like to him: and we then act most for his glory, when

* Joh. 15. 8. *Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.*

† As it is said of the material tabernacle, *Exod. 25.*

a true spirit of *sanctity, justice, meekness, &c.* runs through all our actions; when we so live in the world as becomes those that converse with the great mind and wisdom of the whole world, with that Almighty spirit that made, supports and governs all things, with that being from whence all good flows, and in which there is no spot, stain or shadow of evil; and so being captivated and overcome by the sense of the divine loveliness and goodness, endeavour to be like him, and conform our selves as much as may be to him.

When God *seeks his own glory*, he does not so much endeavour any thing *without himself*. He did not bring this stately fabrick of the universe into being, that he might for such a monument of his mighty power and beneficence gain some *panegyrics* or applause from a little of that fading breath which he had made. Neither was that gracious contrivance of restoring lapsed men to himself a *plot* to get himself some eternal *Hallelujahs*, as if he had so ardently thirsted after the layes of glorified spirits, or desired a quire of souls to sing forth his praises. Neither was it to let the world see how *magnificent* he was. No, it is his own *internal glory* that he most loves, and the communication thereof which he seeks: as *Plato* sometimes speaks of the divine love, it arises not out of *indigency*, as created love does, but out of *fulness* and redundancy; it is an overflowing fountain, and that love which descends upon created being is a free efflux from the Almighty source of love: and it is well pleasing to him that those creatures which he hath made should partake of it. Though God cannot *seek*

36 *The Excellency of True Religion*

his own glory so as if he might acquire any addition to himself, yet he may *seek it* so as to communicate it out of himself. It was a good maxime of *Plato*, τῷ Θεῷ ἰδεῖν φθόνος· which is better stated by * *S. James*, *God giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not*. And by that glory of his which he loves to impart to his creatures, I understand those stamps and impressions of *wisdom, justice, patience, mercy, love, peace, joy*, and other divine gifts which he bestows freely upon the minds of men. And thus God triumphs in his own glory, and takes pleasure in the communication of it.

As God's seeking his own glory in respect of us, is most properly the flowing forth of his goodness upon us: so our seeking the glory of God is most properly our endeavouring a participation of his goodness, and an earnest unceasing pursuing after divine perfection. When God becomes so great in our eyes, and all created things so little, that we reckon upon nothing as worthy of our aims or ambitions but a serious participation of the divine nature; and the exercise of divine virtues, *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness*, and the like; when the soul beholding the infinite beauty and loveliness of the divinity, and then looking down and beholding all created perfection mantled over with darkness, is ravish'd into love and admiration of that never-setting brightness, and endeavours after the greatest resemblance of God in *justice, love, and goodness*; when conversing with him ἐν ᾧ ἡ ψυχή ἐπαφῇ, by a secret feeling of the virtue, sweetness and power of his
goodness,

goodness, we endeavour to assimilate our selves to him: then we may be said to *glorifie* him indeed. God seeks no glory but his own; and we have none of our own to give him. God in all things seeks himself and his own glory, as finding nothing *better* than himself; and when we love him above all things, and endeavour to be most like him, we *declare plainly* that we count nothing *better* than he is.

I doubt we are too nice logicians sometimes in distinguishing between *the glory of God* and *our own salvation*. We cannot in a true sense seek *our own salvation* more than *the glory of God*, which triumphs most and discovers it self most effectually in *the salvation* of souls; for indeed *this salvation* is nothing else but a true participation of the divine nature. *Heaven* is not a thing *without us*, nor is happiness any thing distinct from a true conjunction of the mind with God in a secret feeling of his goodness and reciprocation of affection to him, wherein the divine glory most unfolds it self. And there is nothing that a soul touch'd with any serious sense of God can more earnestly thirst after or seek with more strength of affection than this. Then shall we be happy, when God comes to be all in all in us. To love God *above our selves* is not indeed so properly to love him *above the salvation of our souls*, as if these were distinct things; but it is to love him *above all our own sinfull affections*, and *above our particular beings*, and to conform our selves to him. And as that which is † *good relatively, and in order to us*,

† See the Discourse *Of the Existence and Nature of God*, chap. 9.

is so much the better, by how much the more it is commensurate and conformed to us: so on the other side, that which is *good absolutely and essentially*, requires that our minds and affections should, as far as may be, be commensurate and conform'd to it: and herein is God most glorified, and we made happy. As we cannot truly love the first and highest good while we serve a designe upon it, and subordinate it to our selves: so neither is our own salvation consistent with any such fordid, pinching and particular love. We cannot be compleatly blessed, till the *idea boni*, or the *ipsum bonum*, which is God, exercise its soveraignty over all the faculties of our souls, rendring them as like to it self as may consist with their proper capacity.

[See more of this in the Discourse of the *Existence and Nature of God*, chap. 4. and more largely in that *Latine Discourse*, shortly to be printed, *Pietati studere ex intuitu mercedis non est illicitum.*]

CHAP. VI.

The fourth property or effect discovering the excellency of religion, viz. That it begets the greatest serenity and composedness of mind, and brings the truest contentment, the purest and most satisfying joy and pleasure to every holy soul. God, as being that uniform chief good, and the one last end, does attract and fix the soul. Wicked men distracted through a multiplicity of objects and ends. How the restless appetite of our wills after some supreme good leads to the knowlege (as of a Deity, so)
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of the unity of a Deity. How the joys and delights of good men differ from and far excell those of the wicked. The constancy and tranquillity of the spirits of good men in reference to external troubles. All perturbations of the mind arise from an inward rather than an outward cause. The Stoicks method for attaining *ἀταραξία* and true rest examined, and the insufficiency of it discovered. A further illustration of what has been said concerning the peaceful and happy state of good men, from the contrary state of the wicked.

4. **T**HE fourth property and effect of true religion wherein it expresseth its own nobleness is this, that it begets the greatest serenity, constancy and composedness of mind, and brings the truest contentment, the most satisfying joy and pleasure, the purest and most divine sweetness and pleasure to the spirits of good men. Every good man, in whom religion rules, is at peace and unity with himself, is as a city compacted together. Grace doth more and more reduce all the faculties of the soul into a perfect subjection and subordination to itself. The union and conjunction of the soul with God, that *primitive unity*, is that which is the alone original and fountain of all peace, and the centre of rest: as the further any being slides from God, the more it breaks into discords within it self, as not having any centre within it self which might collect and unite all the faculties thereof to it self, and so knit them up together in a sweet confederacy amongst themselves. God only is such an *Almighty goodness*, as can attract all the powers

ers in man's soul to it self, as being an object transcendently adequate to the largest capacities of any created being, and so unite man perfectly to himself in the true enjoyment of *one uniform and simple good*.

It must be *one last end and supreme good* that can fix man's mind, which otherwise will be tossed up and down in perpetual uncertainties: and become as many several things as those poor *particularities* are which it meets with. A wicked man's life is so distracted by a *multiplicity of ends and objects*, that it never is nor can be consistent to it self, nor continue in any composed, settled frame: it is the most intricate, irregular and confused thing in the world, no one part of it agreeing with another, because the whole is not firmly knit together by the power of some *one last end* running through all. Whereas the life of a good man is under the sweet command of *one supreme goodness and last end*. This alone is that living form and soul, which running through all the powers of the mind and actions of life, collects all together into one fair and beautifull system, making all that variety conspire into perfect unity; whereas else all would fall asunder like the members of a dead body when once the soul is gone, every little particle flitting each from other. It was a good maxim of *Pythagoras* quoted by *Clemens Alexandrinus*, Δεῖ ἡ τὸν ἄνθρωπον εἶνα ἑνός, *oportet etiam hominem unum fieri*. A divided mind and a *multiform life* speaks the greatest disparagement that may be: it is only the intermediation of *one last end* that can reconcile a man perfectly to himself and his own happiness. This is the best temper and composedness

sedness of the soul, ὅταν εἰς ἓν καὶ εἰς μίαν ὁμολογίαν ἐνωθῇ, as Plotinus speaks, when by a conjunction with *one chief good and last end* it is drawn up into an unity and consent with it self; when all the faculties of the soul with their several issues and motions, though never so many in themselves, like so many lines meet together in one and the same centre. It is not one and the same goodness that alwaies acts the faculties of a wicked man; but as many several images and pictures of goodness as a quick and working fancy can represent to him; which so divide his affections, that he is no *one thing* within himself, but tossed hither and thither by the most independent principles and imaginations that may be. But a good man hath singled out the supreme goodness, which by an omnipotent sweetness draws all his affections after it, and so makes them all with the greatest complacency conspire together in the pursuit and embraces of it. Were there not some *infinite and self-sufficient goodness*, and that *perfectly one*, ἀρχικὴ μόνως, (as Simplicius doth phrase it) man would be a most miserably-distracted creature. As the restless appetite within man after some infinite and soveraign good (without the enjoyment of which it could never be satisfied) does commend unto us the notion of a Deity: so the perpetual distractions and divisions that would arise in the soul upon a plurality of Deities, may seem no less to evince *the unity* of that Deity. Were not this chief good *perfectly one*, were there any other equal to it; man's soul would hang *in equilibrio*, equally poised, equally desiring the enjoyment of both, but moving to neither; like a piece of iron between two load-

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stones of equal virtue. But when religion enters into the soul, it charms all its restless rage and violent appetite, by discovering to it the universal fountain-fulness of one supreme Almighty goodness; and leading it out of it self into a conjunction therewith, it lulls it into the most undisturbed rest and quietness in the lap of divine enjoyment; where it meets with full contentment, and rests adequately satisfied in the fruition of the infinite, uniform and essential goodness and loveliness, the true *Αὐτόκαλον*, that is not *ᾧ μὲν καλόν, ᾧ δὲ ἕ καλόν, ἀλλ' ὅλον δι' ὅλα καλόν*, as a noble philosopher doth well express it.

- *The peace* which a religious soul is possessed of is such a *peace as passeth all understanding*: the joy that it meets with in the ways of holiness is *unspeakable and full of glory*. The delights and sweetnesses that accompany a religious life are of a purer and more excellent nature then the pleasures of worldly men. The spirit of a good man is a more pure and refined thing then to delight it self in the thick mire of earthly and sensual pleasures, which carnal men rowle and tumble themselves in with so much greediness: *non admittit ad volatum accipitrem suum in terra pulverulenta*, as the Arabick proverb hath it. It speaks the degeneration of any soul whatsoever, that it should desire to incorporate it self with any of the gross, dreggy, sensual delights here below. But a soul purified by religion from all earthly dreggs, delights to mingle it self only with things that are most divine and spiritual. There is nothing that can beget any pleasure or sweetness but in some harmonical faculty which hath some kindred and acquaintance with it. As
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it is in the *senses*, so in every other faculty there is such a *natural kind of science* as whereby it can single out its own proper object from every thing else, and is better able to define it to it self then the exactest artist in the world can; and when once it hath found it out, it presently feels it self so perfectly fitted and matched by it, that it dissolves into secret joy and pleasure in the entertainment of it. True *delight* and *joy* is begotten by the conjunction of some discerning faculty with its proper object. The proper objects for a mind and spirit are *divine* and *immaterial* things, with which it hath the greatest affinity, and therefore triumphs most in its converse with them; as it is well observed by * *Seneca, hoc habet argumentum divinitatis suae, quod illum divina delectant; nec ut alienis interest, sed ut suis*: and when it converseth most with these high and noble objects, it behaves it self most gracefully and lives most becoming it self; and it lives also most deliciously, nor can it any where else be better provided for, or indeed fare so well. A good man disdains to be beholding to the wit or art or industry of any creature to find him out and bring him in a constant revenue and maintenance for his joy and pleasure: the language of his heart is that of the Psalmist, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me*. Religion alwaies carries a sufficient provision of *joy* and *sweetness* along with it to maintain it self withall: *all the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*. Religion is no fullen *stoicisme* or oppressing *melancholie*, it is no enthralling tyranny exercised over those

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noble

* In Praefat. ad l. i. Nat. Quaest.

noble and vivacious affections of love and delight, as those men that were never acquainted with the life of it may imagine; but it is full of a vigorous and masculine delight and joy, and such as advanceth and ennobles the soul, and does not weaken or dispirit the life and power of it, as sensual and earthly joys doe, when the soul, unacquainted with religion, is enforc'd to give entertainment to these gross and earthly things, for the want of enjoyment of some better good. The spirit of a good man may justly behave it self with a noble disdain to all terrene pleasures, because it knows where to mend its fare; it is the same Almighty and eternal goodness which is the happiness of God and of all good men. The truly-religious soul affects nothing primarily and fundamentally but God himself; his contentment even in the midst of his worldly employments is in the sun of the divine favour that shines upon him: this is as the *manna* that lies upon the top of all outward blessings which his spirit gathers up and feeds upon with delight. Religion consists not in a toilesome drudgery about some bodily exercises and external performances; nor is it onely the spending of our selves in such attendances upon God and services to him as are onely accommodated to this life, (though every employment for God is both amiable and honourable:) but there is something of our religion that interests us in a present possession of that *joy which is unspeakable and glorious*; which leads us into the porch of heaven, and to the confines of eternity. It sometimes carries up the soul into a mount of transfiguration, or to the top of *pisgah*, where it may
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take a prospect of the promised land; and gives it a map or scheme of its future inheritance: it gives it sometimes some anticipations of blessedness, some foretastes of those joys, those rivers of pleasure which run at God's right hand for evermore.

I might further add as a *mantissa* to this present argument, *the tranquillity and composedness* of a good man's spirit in reference to all *external* molestations. Religion having made a through-pacification of the soul within it self, renders it impregnable to all outward assaults: so that it is at rest and lives securely in the midst of all those boisterous storms and tempests that make such violent impressions upon the spirits of wicked men. Here the *stoicks* have stated the case aright, that all *perturbations of the mind* arise not properly from an *outward* but an *inward* cause: it is not any *outward* evil but an *inward imagination* bred in the womb of the soul it self, that molests and grieves it. The more that the soul is restored to it self, and lives at the height of it's own being, the more easily may it disdain and despise any design or combination against it by the most blustering giants in the world. A Christian that enjoys himself in God, will not be beholding to the worlds fair and gentle usage for the *composedness* of his mind; no, he enjoys that *peace and tranquillity within himself* which no creature can bestow upon him, or take from him.

But the *Stoicks* were not so happy in their notions about *the way to true rest and composedness of spirit*. It is not (by their leave) the souls collecting and gathering up it self within the circumference

ference of it's own essence, nor is it a rigid restraining and keeping in its own issues and motions within the confines of its own natural endowments, which is able to conferre upon it that *ἀταραξία* and *composedness of mind* which they so much idolize as the supreme and onely blifs of man, and render it free from all kind of perturbations: (for by what we find in *Seneca* and others, it appears, that the *Stoicks* seeking an *autarchy* within themselves, and being loth to be beholden to God for their happiness, but that each of them might be as God, self-sufficient and happy in the enjoyment of himself, endeavoured by their sour doctrine and a rigid discipline over their souls, their severities against passions and all those restless motions in the soul after some higher good, to attain a complete *ἀταραξία* and a full contentment within themselves.) But herein they mist of the true method of finding rest to themselves, it being the union of the soul with God, that uniform, simple and unbounded good, which is the sole original of all true inward peace. Neither were it an happiness worth the having, for a mind, like an hermite sequestred from all things else, by a recession into it self, to spend an eternity in self-converse and the enjoyment of such a diminutive superficial nothing as it self is and must necessarily be to it self. It is onely peculiar to God to be happy in himself alone; and God who has been more liberal in his provisions for man, hath created in man such a spring of restless motion, that with the greatest impatiency forceth him out of himself, and violently tosseth him to and fro, till he come to fix himself upon some solid and self-

self-subsistent goodness. Could a man find himself withdrawn from all terrene and material things, and perfectly retired into himself; were the whole world so quiet and calme about him, as not to offer to make the least attempt upon the composedness and constancy of his mind; might he be so well entertain'd at his own home, as to find no frowns, no sour looks from his own conscience; might he have that security from heaven, that God would not disquiet his fancied tranquillity by embittering his thoughts with any dreadful apprehensions; yet he should find something within him that would not let him be at rest, but would rend him from himself, and toss him from his own foundation and consistency. There is an insatiable appetite in the soul of man, like a greedy lion hunting after his prey, that would render him impatient of his own pinching penury, and could never satisfy it self with such a thin and spare diet as he finds at home. There are two principall faculties in the soul which, like the two daughters of the horse-leach, are always crying, *give, give*: these are those hungry vultures which, if they cannot find their prey abroad, return and gnaw the soul it self: where the carcassee is, there will the eagles be gathered together. By this we may see how unavailable to the attaining of true rest and peace that conceit of the *Stoicks* was, who supposed the onely way and method hereto was this, to confine the soul thus monastically to its own home. We read in the gospel of such a question of our Saviour's, *what went you out into the wilderness to see?* we may invert it, what do you return within, to see

see? a soul confined within the private and narrow cell of its own particular being? such a soul deprives it self of all that Almighty and essential glory and goodness which shines round about it, which spreads it self through the whole universe; I say it deprives it self of all this, for the enjoying of such a poor petty and diminutive thing as it self is, which yet it can never enjoy truly in such a retiredness.

We have seen the peacefull and happy state of the truly-religious: but it is otherwise with wicked and irreligious men. *There is no peace to the wicked; but they are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt;* as it is exprest by the prophet *Esay**. The mind of a wicked man is like the sea when it roares and rages through the striving of severall contrary winds upon it. Furious lusts and wild passions within, as they warre against heaven and the more noble and divine part of the soul, so they warr amongst themselves, maintaining perpetuall contests, and contending which shall be the greatest: *Scelera dissident*. These indeed are the *Cadmus*-brood rising out of the serpent's teeth, ready arm'd one against another: whence it is that the soul of a wicked man becomes a very uninhabitable and incommodious place to it self, full of disquietness and trouble through the many contests and civil commotions maintained within it. The minds of wicked men are like those disconsolate and desolate spirits which our Saviour speaks of *Matth. 12.* which being cast out of their habitation, wander up and down through dry and desert

* Chap. 57.

places, seeking rest but finding none. The soul that finds not some solid and self-sufficient good to centre it self upon, is a boisterous and restless thing: and being without God, it wanders up and down the world, destitute, afflicted, tormented with vehement hunger and thirst after some satisfying good: and as any one shall bring it tidings, *lo here*, or *lo there is good*, it presently goes out towards it, and with a swift and speedy flight hastens after it. The sense of an *inward* indigency doth stimulate and enforce it to seek its contentment *without* it self, and so it wanders up and down from one creature to another; and thus becomes distracted by a *multiplicity of objects*. And while it cannot find some one and onely object upon which, as being perfectly adequat to its capacities, it may wholly bestow it self; while it is tossed with restless and vehement motions of *desire* and *love* through a world of painted beauties, false glosing excellencies; courting all, but matching nowhere; violently hurried every whither, but finding nowhere *objectum par amori*; while it converseth onely with these *pinching particularities* here below, and is not yet acquainted with *the universal goodness*; it is certainly far from true rest and satisfaction, from a fixt, composed temper of spirit: but being distracted by *multiplicity of objects* and *ends*, there can never be any firm and stable peace or friendship at home amongst all its powers and faculties: nor can there be a firm amity and friendship abroad betwixt wicked men themselves, as *Aristotle* in his ethicks does conclude, because all *vice* is so *multiform* and inconsistent a thing, and so

there can be no true concatenation of *affections* and *ends* between them. Whereas in all good men virtue and goodness is one form and soul to them all, that unites them together, and there is the one, simple and uniform good, that guides and governs them all. They are not as a ship tossed in the tumultuous ocean of this world without any *compass* at all to steer by; but they direct their course by the certain guidance of the *one last end*, as the true *pole-star* of all their motion. But while the soul lies benighted in a thick ignorance (as it is with wicked men,) and beholds not some *stable* and *eternal good* to move toward; though it may, by the strength of that principle of *activeness* within it self, spend it self perpetually with swift and giddy motions; yet it will be always contesting with secret disturbances, and cannot act but with many reluctancies, as not finding an object equall to the force and strength of its vast affections to act upon.

By what hath been said may appear the vast difference between the ways of *sin* and of *holiness*. Inward distractions and disturbances, *tribulation and anguish upon every soul that doth evil: but to every man that worketh good, glory, honour and peace*, inward composednesse and tranquillity of spirit, pure and divine joys farr excelling all sensual pleasures; in a word, true contentment of spirit and full satisfaction in God, whom the pious soul loves above all things, and longs still after a nearer enjoyment of him. I shall conclude this particular with what *Plotinus* concludes his book, that the life of holy and divine men is *βίος ἀνδρῶν καὶ τῆς φύσιν*

ψυχὴ μόνῃ πρὸς μόνον, a life not touch'd with these vanishing delights of time, but a flight of the soul alone to God alone.

C H A P. VII.

The fifth property or effect discovering the excellency of religion, viz. That it advanceth the soul to an holy boldness and humble familiarity with God, and to a comfortable confidence concerning the love of God toward it, and its own salvation. Fearfulness, consternation of mind and frightful passions are consequent upon sin and guilt. These together with the most dismall deportments of trembling and amazement are agreeable to the nature of the devil, who delights to be serv'd in this manner by his worshippers. Love, joy and hope are most agreeable to the nature of God, and most pleasing to him. The right apprehensions of God are such as are apt to beget love to God, delight and confidence in him. A true Christian is more for a solid and well-grounded peace than for high raptures and feelings of joy. How a Christian should endeavour the assurance of his salvation. That he should not importunately expect or desire some extraordinary manifestations of God to him, but rather look after the manifestation of the life of God within him, the foundation or beginning of heaven and salvation in his own soul. That self-resignation, and the subduing of our own wills, are greatly available to obtain assurance. The vanity and absurdity of that opinion, viz. That in a perfect

resignation of our wills to God's will, a man should be content with his own damnation and to be the subject of eternal wrath in hell, if it should so please God.

5. **T**HE fifth property or effect whereby true religion discovers its own nobleness and excellency is this, that it advanceth the soul to an holy boldness and humble familiarity with God, as also to a well-grounded hope and comfortable confidence concerning the love of God toward it, and its own salvation. The truly religious soul maintains an humble and sweet familiarity with God; and with great alacrity of spirit, without any consternation and servility of spirit, is enabled to look upon the glory and majesty of the most high; but sin and wickedness is pregnant with fearfulness and horror. That trembling and consternation of mind which possesses wicked men, is nothing else but a brat of darkness, an *empusa* begotten in corrupt and irreligious hearts. While men walk in darkness, and are of the night, (as the Apostle speaks,) then it is onely that they are vext with those ugly and gassy mormos that terrify and torment them. But when once the day breaks, and true religion opens her self upon the soul like the eye-lids of the morning, then all those shadows and frightfull apparitions flee away. As all light and love and joy descend from above from the father of lights: so all darkness and fearfulness and despair are from below; they arise from corrupt and earthly minds, and are like those gross vapors arising from this earthly globe, that not being able to
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get up towards heaven, spread themselves about the circumference of that body where they were first begotten, infesting it with darkness and generating into thunder and lightning, clouds and tempests. But the higher a Christian ascends ἐκ τῆ ἀσπλάγῃ above this dark dungeon of the body, the more that religion prevails within him, the more then shall he find himself as it were in a clear heaven, in a region that is calm and serene; and the more will those black and dark affections of *fear and despair* vanish away, and those clear and bright affections of *love and joy and hope* break forth in their strength and lustre.

The devil, who is the prince of darkness and the great tyrant, delights to be served with gasty affections and the most dismal deportments of *trembling and astonishment*; as having nothing at all of amiableness or excellency in him to commend himself to his worshippers. Slavery and servility (that γλωττόκομον τῆς ψυχῆς, as *Longinus* truly calls it) is the badge and livery of the devil's religion: hence those φριχὰ μυστήρια of the heathens perform'd with much trembling and horror†. But God, who is the supreme *goodness* and essentiall both *love and love-fulness*, takes most pleasure in those *sweet and delightfull affections* of the soul, viz. *Love, joy and hope*, which are most correspondent to his own nature. The ancient superstition of the heathens was always very nice and curious in honouring every one of their Gods with sacrifices and rites most agreeable to their natures: I am sure there is no incense, no offering we can present

† The words for *false Gods and idols*, *gatzabim* and *emim* import *Trouble and Terror* and *Frightfull passions* in their worshippers.

present God with, is so sweet, so acceptable to him as our *love* and *delight* and *confidence* in him; and when he comes into the souls of men, he makes these his throne, his place of rest, as finding the greatest agreeableness therein to his own essence. A good man that finds himself made partaker of the divine nature, and transform'd into the image of God, infinitely takes pleasure in God, as being altogether lovely, according to that in *Cant. 5. cullo mahamadim, Totus ipse est desideria*; and his meditation of God is *sweet unto him, Ps. 104. S. John* that lay in the bosome of Christ who came from the bosome of the father, and perfectly understood his eternal essence, hath given us the fullest description that he could make of him, when he tells us that *God is love*, and he that dwells in God, dwells in love; and reposing himself in the bosome of an Almighty goodness, where he finds nothing but love and loveliness, he now displays all the strength and beauty of those his choicest and most precious affections of *love and joy and confidence*; his soul is now at ease, and rest in peace, neither is there any thing to make afraid: he is got beyond all those powers of darknesse which give such continual alarms in this lower world, and are always troubling the earth: he is got above all fears and despairs; he is in a bright clear region, above clouds and tempests, *infra se despicit nubes*. There is no frightful terribleness in the supreme majesty. That men apprehend God at any time in such a dismayed manner, it must not at all be made an argument of his nature, but of our *sinfulness and weakness*. The sun in the heavens always

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was and will be a globe of light and brightness, howsoever a purblind eye is rather dazled then enlightened by it. There is an inward sense in mans soul, which, were it once awaken'd and excited with an inward tast and relish of the divinity, could better define God to him then all the world else. It is the sincere Christian that so tastes and sees how good and sweet the Lord is, as none else does: *the God of hope fills him with all joy and peace in believing*, so that he *abounds in hope*, as the Apostle speaks *Rom. 15*. He quietly reposes himself in God; *his heart is fixed, trusting in the lord*; he is more for a solid peace and settled calme of spirit, then for high raptures and feelings of joy or extraordinary manifestations of God to him: he does not passionately desire nor importunately expect such things; he rather looks after the manifestations of the goodness and power of God within him, in subduing all in his soul that is unlike and contrary to God, and forming him into his image and likeness.

Though I think it worthy of a Christian to endeavour *the assurance of his own salvation*; yet perhaps it might be the safest way to moderate his curiosity of prying into God's *book of life*, and to stay a while untill he sees himself within the confines of *salvation* it self. Should a man hear *a voice* from heaven or see *a vision* from the Almighty, to testify unto him the love of God towards him; yet methinks it were more desireable to find a revelation of all *from within*, arising up from the bottome and centre of a mans own soul, in the reall and internal impressions of *a godlike nature* upon his own spirit;
and

56 *The Excellency of true Religion*

and thus to find *the foundation and beginning of heaven and happiness within himself*: it were more desirable to see the crucifying of our own will, the mortifying of the mere animal life, and to see a divine life rising up in the room of it, as a sure pledge and inchoation of immortality and *happiness*, the very essence of which consists in a perfect conformity and chearfull compliance of all the powers of our souls with the will of God.

The best way of gaining *a well-grounded assurance of the divine love* is this, for a man to *overcome himself and his own will*: to him that overcomes shall be given that white stone, and in it the new name written, which no man knoweth but he that receives it†. He that beholds the sun of righteousness arising upon the horizon of his soul with healing in its wings, and chasing away all that misty darkness of his own *self-will* and *passions*; such a one desires not now the starr-light to know whether it be day or not, nor cares he to pry into heaven's secrets and to search into the hidden rolles of eternity, there to see the whole plot of his salvation; for he views it transacted upon the inward stage of his own soul, and reflecting upon himself he may behold a heaven opened from within, and a throne set up in his soul, and an Almighty Saviour sitting upon it, and reigning within him: he now finds the kingdom of heaven within him, and sees that it is not a thing merely reserved for him without him, being already made partaker of the sweetness and efficacy of it. What the Jewes say of *the spirit of prophecy*,
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† Revel. 2.

may not unfitly be applyed to the Holy Ghost, the true comforter dwelling in the minds of good men as a sure earnest of their eternal inheritance, *ein nebua shoreb alla gnal gibbor*, *The spirit resides not but upon a man of fortitude*, one that gives proof of this *fortitude* in subduing his own self-will and his affections. We read of *Elisha*, that he was fain to call for a musical instrument and one to play before him, to allay the heat of his passions, before he could converse with the propheticall spirit. The holy spirit is too pure and gentle a thing to dwell in a mind muddled and disturb'd by those impure dreggs, those thick fogs and mists that arise from our self-will and passions; our prevailing over these is the best way to cherish the holy spirit, by which we may be sealed unto the day of redemption.

To conclude this particular: it is a venturous and rugged guess and conceit which some men have, that in a perfect resignation of our wills to the divine will a man should be content with his own damnation, and to be the subject of eternal wrath in hell, if it should so please God. Which is as impossible as it is for him that infinitely thirsts after a true participation of the divine nature, and most earnestly endeavours a most inward union with God in spirit, by a denial of himself and his own will, to swell up in self-love, pride and arrogancy against God; the one whereof is the most *substantial heaven*, the other the most *real hell*: whereas indeed by conquering our selves we are translated from death to life, and the kingdom of God and heaven is already come into us,

CHAP. VIII.

The sixth property or effect discovering the excellency of religion, viz. That it spiritualizes material things, and carries up the souls of good men from sensible and earthly things to things intellectual and divine. There are lesser and fuller representations of God in the creatures. To converse with God in the creation, and to pass out of the sensible world into the intellectual, is most effectually taught by religion. Wicked men converse not with God as shining out in the creatures; they converse with them in a sensual and unspiritual manner. Religion does spiritualize the creation to good men: it teaches them to look at any perfections or excellencies in themselves and others, not so much as theirs or that others, but as so many beams flowing from one and the same fountain of light; to love them all in God, and God in all; the universal goodness in a particular being. A good man enjoys and delights in whatsoever good he sees elsewhere, as if it were his own: he does not fondly love and esteem either himself or others. The divine temper and strain of the ancient Philosophy.

6. **T**HE sixth property or effect wherein religion discovers its own excellency is this, that it spiritualizes material things, and so carries up the souls of good men from earthly things to things divine, from this sensible world to the intellectual,

God

God made the universe and all the creatures contained therein as so many glasses wherein he might reflect his own glory: he hath copied forth himself in the creation; and in this outward world we may read the lovely characters of the divine goodness, power and wisdom. In some creatures there are darker representations of God, there are the prints and footsteps of God; but in others there are clearer and fuller representations of the divinity, the face and image of God; according to that known saying of the schoolmen, *remotiores similitudines creaturae ad Deum dicuntur vestigium; propinquiores vero imago*. But how to find God here and feelingly to converse with him, and being affected with the sense of the divine glory shining out upon the creation, how to pass out of the *sensible world* into the *intellectual*, is not so effectually taught by that Philosophy which profess'd it most, as by true religion: that which knits and unites God and the soul together, can best teach it how to ascend and descend upon those golden links that unite as it were the world to God. That divine *wisdome* that contrived and beautified this glorious structure, can best explain her own art, and carry up the soul back again in these reflected beams to him who is the fountain of them. Though good men, all of them, are not acquainted with all those Philosophical notions touching the relation between created and the uncreated being; yet may they easily find every creature pointing out to that being whose image and superscription it bears, and climb up from those darker resemblances of the divine wisdom and goodness shining out

in different degrees upon several creatures, ὡς αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτοὺς τῶν, as the antients speak, till they sweetly repose themselves in the bosom of the divinity: and while they are thus conversing with this lower world, and are viewing *the invisible things of God in the things that are made*, in this visible and outward creation, they find God many times secretly flowing into their souls, and leading them silently out of the court of the temple into the holy place. But it is otherwise with wicked men; they dwell perpetually upon the dark side of the creatures, and converse with these things only in a gross, sensual, earthly and unspiritual manner; they are so encompass'd with the thick and foggy mist of their own corruptions, that they cannot see God there where he is most visible: *the light shineth in darkness, but darkness comprehends it not*: their souls are so deeply sunk into that house of clay which they carry about with them, that were there nothing of *body* or bulky *matter* before them, they could find nothing to exercise themselves about.

But religion, where it is in truth and in power, renews the very spirit of our minds, and doth in a manner *spiritualize* this outward creation to us, and doth in a more excellent way perform that which the *peripateticks* are wont to affirm of their *intellectus agens*, in purging bodily and material things from the feculency and dregs of *matter*, and separating them from those circumstantiating and streightning conditions of *time* and *place*, and the like; and teaches the soul to look at those *perfections* which it finds here below, not so much as the perfections of *this* or
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that body, as they adorn *this* or *that* particular being, but as they are so many rays issuing forth from that first and essential perfection, in which they all meet and embrace one another in the most close friendship. Every particular good is a blossom of the first goodness; every created excellency is a beam descending from the father of lights: and should we separate all these *particularities* from God, all affection spent upon them would be unchast, and their embraces adulterous. We should love all things in God, and God in all things, because he is all in all, the beginning and original of being, the perfect idea of their goodness, and the end of their motion. It is nothing but a thick mist of pride and self-love that hinders mens eyes from beholding that sun which both enlightens them and all things else: but when true religion begins once to dawn upon mens souls, and with its shining light chafes away their black night of ignorance; then they behold themselves and all things else enlightened (though in a different way) by one and the same sun, and all the powers of their souls fall down before God and ascribe all glory to him. Now it is that a good man is no more solicitous whether *this* or *that* good thing be *mine*, or whether *my* perfections exceed the measure of *this* or *that* particular creature; for whatsoever *good* he beholds any where, he enjoys and delights in it as much as if it were his own, and whatever he beholds in himself, he looks not upon it as his *property* but as a *common* good; for all these beams come from one and the same fountain and ocean of light in whom he loves them all with an uni-
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universal love: when his affections run along the stream of any created excellencies, whether his own or any ones else, yet they stay not here, but run on till they fall into the ocean; they do not settle into a fond love and admiration either of himself or any others excellencies, but he owns them as so many pure effluxes and emanations from God, and in a particular being loves the universal goodnes. *Si sciretur a me veritas, sciretur etiam me illud non esse, aut illud non esse meum, nec a me.*

Thus may a good man walk up and down the world as in a garden of spices, and suck a divine sweetness out of every flower. There is a twofold meaning in every creature, as the Jews speak of their law, a *literal*, and a *mystical*, and the one is but the ground of the other: and as they say of divers pieces of their law, *dabar lematah ramas lemagnaleb*, so a good man sayes of every thing that his senses offer to him, *it speaks to his lower part, but it points out something above to his mind and spirit*. It is the drowfie and muddy spirit of superstition, which being lull'd asleep in the lap of worldly delights, is faine to set some idol at its elbow, something that may jogg it and put it in mind of God. Whereas true religion never finds it self out of the infinite sphere of the divinity, and where-ever it finds *beauty, harmony, goodness, love, ingenuity, wisdom, holiness, justice*, and the like, it is ready to say, *here, and there is God*: wheresoever any such perfections shine out, an holy mind climbs up by these sun-beams, and raises up it self to God.

And seeing God hath never thrown the world
from

from himself, but runs through all created essence, containing the archetypal ideas of all things in himself, and from thence deriving and imparting several prints of beauty and excellency all the world over; a soul that is truly *Deo ordine* God-like, a mind that is enlightened from the same fountain, and hath its inward senses affected with the sweet relishes of divine goodness, cannot but every where behold it self in the midst of that glorious unbounded being who is indivisibly every where. A good man finds every place he treads upon *holy ground*; to him the world is God's temple; he is ready to say with *Jacob*, Gen. 28. *how dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God.*

To conclude, it was a degenerated and unworthy spirit in that Philosophy which first separated and made such distances between *Metaphysical* truths and the truths of *nature*; whereas the first and most antient wisdom amongst the Heathens was indeed a Philosophical divinity, or a divine Philosophy; which continued for divers ages, but as men grew worse, their queazy stomachs began to loath it: which made the truly-wise *Socrates* complain of the sophisters of that age which began now to corrupt and debase it; whereas heretofore the spirit of Philosophy was more generous and divine, and did more purifie and ennoble the souls of men, commending intellectual things to them, and taking them off from settling upon sensible and material things here below, and still exciting them to endeavour after the nearest resemblance of God the supreme goodness and loveliness, and an intimate conjunction with him; which, according

according to the strain of that Philosophy, was the true happiness of immortal souls.

CHAP. IX.

The seventh and last property or effect discovering the excellency of religion, viz. That it raiseth the minds of good men to a due observance of and attendance upon divine providence, and enables them to serve the will of God, and to acquiesce in it. For a man to serve providence and the will of God entirely, to work with God, and to bring himself and all his actions into a compliance with God's will, his ends and designs, is an argument of the truest nobleness of spirit; it is the most excellent and divine life; and it is most for man's advantage. How the consideration of divine providence is the way to inward quietness and establishment of spirit. How wicked men carry themselves unbecomingly through their impatience and fretfulness under the disposals of providence. The beauty and harmony of the various methods of providence.

7. **T**HE seventh and last property or effect wherein true religion expresth its own nobleness and excellency, is this, that it raiseth the minds of good men to a due observance of and attendance upon divine providence, and enables them to serve the will of God, and to acquiesce in it. Wheresoever God hath a tongue to speak, there they have eares to hear; and being attentive to God in the soft and still motions

motions of *providence*, they are ready to obey his call, and to say with * *Esay*, *behold, here am I, send me*. They endeavour to copy forth that lesson which Christ hath set Christians, seriously considering how that they came into this world by God's appointment, not to doe their own wills but the will of him that sent them.

As this consideration quiets the spirit of a good man who is no idle spectator of *providence*, and keeps him in a calm and sober temper in the midst of all storms and tempests; so it makes him most freely to engage himself in the service of *providence*, without any inward reluctance or disturbance. He cannot be content that *providence* should serve it self of him as it doth even of those things that understand it least; but it is his holy ambition to serve it. 'Tis nothing else but hellish pride and self-love that makes men serve themselves, and so set up themselves as idols against God: but it is indeed an argument of true nobleness of spirit for a man to view himself (not in the narrow point of his own being, but) in the unbounded essence of the first cause, so as to be ὅλως τῷ κρείττονος, and to live only as an instrument in the hands of God who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. *Optarem id me esse Deo quod est mihi minus mea*, was the expression of an holy soul.

To a good man to *serve the will of God*, it is in the truest and best sense to *serve himself*, who knows himself to be nothing without or in opposition to God; *quo minus quid sibi arrogat homo, eo evadit nobilior, clarior, diviniior*. This is the most divine life that can be, for a man to

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* *Esay* 6.

act in the world upon eternal designs, and to be so wholly devoted to the will of God, as to serve it most faithfully and entirely. This indeed bestows a kind of *immortality* upon these flitting and *transient* acts of ours, which in themselves are but the off-spring of a moment. A *pillar* or *verse* is a poor sorry monument of any exploit, which yet may well enough become the highest of the worlds bravery. But good men, while they work with God and endeavour to bring themselves and all their actions to a unity with God, his ends and designs, enroll themselves in eternity. This is the proper character of holy souls; their wills are so fully resolv'd into the divine will, that they in all things subscribe to it without any murmurings or debates: they rest well satisfied with, and take complacency in, any passages of divine dispensation, * *ὡς ὑπὸ τῆς ἀρίστης γνώμης ἐπιλεγμένοις*, as being ordered and disposed by a mind and wisdom above according to the highest rules of *goodness*.

The best way for a man rightly to enjoy himself, is to maintain an universal, ready and chearfull compliance with the divine and uncreated will in all things; as knowing that nothing can issue and flow forth from the fountain of *goodness* but that which is good: and therefore a good man is never offended with any piece of divine dispensation, nor hath he any reluctancy against that will that dictates and determines all things by an eternal rule of *goodness*; as knowing, that there is an unbounded and Almighty *love*, that without any disdain or envy freely communicates it self to every thing he made; that

* Epictet. cap. 38.

that feeds even the young ravens that call upon him; that makes his sun to shine, and his rain to fall, both upon the just and unjust; that always enfolds those in his everlasting armes who are made partakers of his own image, perpetually nourishing and cherishing them with the fresh and vital influences of his grace; as knowing also, that there is an all-seeing eye, an unbounded mind and understanding, that derives it self through the whole universe, and sitting in all the wheels of motion, guides them all and powerfully governs the most excentric motions of creatures, and carries them all most harmoniously in their several orbes to one last end. Who then shall give law to God? *where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world?* where is he that would climb up into that *beth din shel hamagnaleh*, the great consistory in heaven, and sitting in consultation with the Almighty, instruct the infinite and incomprehensible wisdom? shall vain man be wiser then his maker? this is the hellish temper of wicked men, they examine and judge of all things by the line and measure of their own self-will, their own opinions and designs; and measuring all things by a crooked rule, they think nothing to be straight; and therefore they fall out with God, and with restless impatience fret and vex themselves: and this fretfulness and impatency in wicked men argues a breach in the just and due constitution of their minds and spirits.

But a good man, whose soul is restored to that frame and constitution it should be in, has better apprehensions of the ways and works of

God, and is better affected under the various disposalls of *providence*. Indeed to a superficial observer of *divine providence* many things there are that seem to be nothing else but *digressions* from the main end of all, and to come to pass by a fortuitous concourse of circumstances; that come in so abruptly and without any concatenation or dependance one upon another, as if they were without any mind or understanding to guide them. But a wise man that looks from the beginning to the end of things, beholds them all in their due place and method acting that part which the supreme mind and wisdom that governs all things hath appointed them, and to carry on one and the same eternal designe, while they move according to their own proper inclinations and measures, and aime at their own particular ends. It were not worth the while to live in a world *κενὴ Θεῷ καὶ προνοίᾳ* devoid of God and providence, as it was well observ'd by the Stoick: and to be subservient unto providence is the holy ambition and great endeavour of a good man, who is so perfectly overpower'd with the love of the universal and infinite goodness, that he would not serve any particular good whatsoever, no not himself, so as to set up in the world and trade for himself, as the men of this world doe who are *lovers of* † *their own selves, and lovers of pleasures more then lovers of God.*

† 2 Tim. 3.

C H A P. X.

4. The excellency of religion in regard of its progress, as it is perpetually carrying on the soul towards perfection. Every nature hath its proper centre which it hastens to. Sin and wickedness is within the attractive power of hell, and hastens thither: grace and holiness is within the central force of heaven, and moves thither. 'Tis not the speculation of heaven as a thing to come that satisfyes the desires of religious souls, but the reall possession of it even in this life. Men are apt to seek after assurance of heaven as a thing to come, rather than after heaven it self and the inward possession of it here. How the assurance of heaven rises from the growth of holinesse and the powerful progress of religion in our souls. That we are not hastily to believe that we are Christ's, or that Christ is in us. That the works which Christ does in holy souls testify of him, and best evidence Christ's spiritual appearance in them.

WE have consider'd the excellency of true religion 1. in regard of its descent and original; 2. in regard of its nature; 3. in regard of its properties and effects. We proceed now to a fourth particular, and shall shew.

4. That religion is a generous and noble thing in regard of its progresse; it is perpetually carrying on that mind in which it is once seated toward perfection. Though the first appearance of it upon the souls of good men may be but as
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the wings of the morning spreading themselves upon the mountains, yet it is still rising higher and higher upon them, chafing away all the filthy mists and vapours of sin and wickedness before it, till it arrives to its meridian altitude. * There is the strength and force of the divinity in it; and though when it first enters into the minds of men, it may seem to be *sown in weakness*, yet it will raise it self *in power*. As Christ was in his *bodily appearance*, he was still increasing in wisdom and knowledge and favour with God and man, untill he was perfected in glory: so is he also in his *spiritual appearance* in the souls of men; and accordingly the New Testament does more then once distinguish of Christ in his several ages and degrees of growth in the souls of all true Christians. Good men are always walking on from strength to strength, till at last they see God in Zion. Religion though it hath its infancy, yet it hath no old age: while it is in its minority, it is always *in motu*; but when it comes to its maturity and full age, it will always be *in quiete*, it is then always the same, and its years fail not, but it shall endure for ever. Holy and religious souls being once toucht with an inward sense of divine beauty and goodness, by a strong impress upon them are moved swiftly after God, and (as the Apostle expresses himself) † *forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, they presse toward the mark, for the prize of the high*

* Prov. 4. 18. *the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.* † Phil. 3.

high calling of God in Christ Jesus; that so they may attain to the resurrection of the dead.

Where a spirit of religion is, there is *the central force of heaven* it self quickening and enlivening those that are informed by it in their motions toward heaven. As on the other side all unhallowed and defiled minds are within *the attractive power of hell*, and are continually hastening their course thither, being strongly pressed down by the weight of their wickedness. *Αἰ τίνας ἔχει κινήσεις ἢ φύσεις*, as *Plutarch* hath well observ'd, every nature in this world hath some proper centre which it is always hastening to. Sin and wickedness does not hover a little over *the bottomless pit* of hell, and onely flutter about it; but it's continually sinking lower and lower into it. Neither does true *grace* make some feeble assaies toward heaven, but by a mighty energy within it self it's always soaring up higher and higher into heaven. A good Christian does not onely court his happiness, and cast now and then a smile upon it, or satisfy himself merely to be contracted to it; but with the greatest ardours of love and desire he pursues the solemnity of the just nuptials, that he may be wedded to it and made one with it. It is not an airy speculation of *heaven* as a thing (though never so undoubtedly) *to come*, that can satisfy his hungry desires, but the reall † possession of it even in this life. Such an happiness would be less in the esteem of good men, that were onely good to be enjoyed at the end of this life when all other enjoyments fail him.

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† So we read Joh. 6. 54. *hath eternal life*; and 1 Ep. Jo. ch. 5. 11, 13.

I wish there be not among some such a light and poor esteem of *heaven*, as makes them more to seek after *assurance of heaven* onely in the *idea* of it as a *thing to come*, then after *heaven it self*; which indeed we can never well be assured of, untill we find it rising up within our selves and glorifying our own souls. When true *assurance* comes, *heaven* it self will appear upon the horizon of our souls, like a morning light chasing away all our dark and gloomy doubtings before it. We shall not need then to light up our candles to seek for it in corners; no, it will display its own lustre and brightness so before us, that we may see it in its own light, and our selves the true possessours of it. We may be too nice and vain in seeking for *signes and tokens* of Christ's *spiritual appearances* in the souls of men, as well as the Scribes and Pharisees were in seeking for them at his *first appearance* in the world. When he comes into us, let us expect till the works that he shall doe within us may testify of him; and be not over-credulous, till we find that he doth those works there which none other could doe. As for a true well-grounded *assurance*, say not so much, *who shall ascend up into heaven*, to fetch it down from thence? or *who shall descend into the deep*, to fetch it up from beneath? for in *the growth* of true internal goodness and in *the progress* of true religion it will freely unfold it self within us. Stay till the grain of mustard-seed it self breaks forth from among the clods that buried it, till through the descent of the heavenly dew it sprouts up and discovers it self openly. This holy *assurance* is indeed the budding and blossoming of felicity
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in our own ſouls; it is the inward ſenſe and feeling of the true life, ſpirit, ſweetneſs and beauty of grace powerfully expreſſing its own energy within us.

Briefly, true religion in *the progreſſe* of it transforms thoſe minds in which it reigns from glory to glory: it goes on and proſpers in bringing all enemies in ſubjection under their feet, in reconciling the minds of men fully to God; and it inſtates them in a firm poſſeſſion of the ſupreme good. This is *the ſeed of God* within holy ſouls, which is always warring againſt *the ſeed of the ſerpent*, till it prevail over it through the divine ſtrength and influence. Though *hell* may open her mouth wide and without meaſure, yet a true Chriſtian in whom the ſeed of God remaineth, is in a good and ſafe condition; he finds himſelf born up by an Almighty arm, and carried upwards as upon eagles wings; and the evil one hath no power over him, or, as S. John expreſſeth it, ὁ Πονηρὸς ἐκ ἀντὶς αὐτοῦ, *the evil one toucheth him not*, 1 ep. chap. 5. v. 18.

CHAP. XI.

5. The excellency of religion in regard of its term and end, viz. perfect bleſſedneſſe. *How unable we are in this ſtate to comprehend and deſcribe the full and perfect ſtate of happineſs and glory to come. The more godlike a Chriſtian is, the better may he underſtand that ſtate. Holineſs and Happineſs not two diſtinct things, but two ſeveral notions of one and the ſame thing. Heaven cannot ſo well be deſined by any thing without us, as by ſomething within us. The great nearneſs and af-*

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74 *The Excellency of True Religion*

finity between sin and hell. The conclusion of this treatise, containing a serious exhortation to a diligent minding of religion, with a discovery of the vanity of those pretenses which keep men off from minding religion.

5. **W**E come now to the fifth and last particular, viz. the excellency of religion *in the term and end of it*, which is nothing else but *bleſſedneſs it ſelf in its full maturity*. Which yet I may not here undertake to explain, for it is altogether ἀπρόσιτον τι, nor can it deſcend ſo low as to accommodate it ſelf to any humane ſtyle. Accordingly S. John tells us, *it does not yet appear what we ſhall be*; and yet that he may give us ſome glimpſe of it, he points us out to God, and tells us, ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἵσόμεθα, *we ſhall be like him, for we ſhall ſee him as he is*. Indeed the beſt way to get a diſcovery of it, is to endeavour as much as may be to be *Godlike*, to live in a feeling converſe with God and in a powerful exerciſe and expreſſion of all godlike diſpoſitions: ſo ſhall our inner man be beſt enabled to *know the breadth and length, the depth and height* of that love and goodneſs which yet *paſſeth all knowledge*. There is a *ſtate of perfection* in the life to come ſo far tranſcendent to any in this life, as that we are not able from hence to take the juſt proportions of it, or to form a full and comprehensive notion of it. We are unable to comprehend the vaſtneſs and fullneſs of that happineſs which the moſt puriſyed ſouls may be raiſed to, or to apprehend how far the mighty power and ſtrength of the divinity deriving it ſelf into created being, may
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communicate a more transcendent life and blessedness to it. We know not what latent powers our souls may here contain within themselves, which then may begin to open and dilate themselves to let in the full streams of the divine goodness when they come nearly and intimately to converse with it; or how *blessedness* may act upon those faculties of our minds which we now have. We know not what illapses and irradiations there may be from God upon souls in glory, that may raise them into a state of perfection surpassing all our imaginations.

As for *corporeal* happiness, there cannot be any thing further added to the *pleasure* of our *bodies* or animal part, then a restoring it from disturbing passion and pain to its just and natural constitution; and therefore some Philosophers have well disputed against the opinion of the *Epicureans* that make *happiness* to consist in *bodily pleasure*, ὅτι πολλαπλασίον ἔχει τὸ λυπηρὸν πρὸς ἡμέτερον. and when *the molestation* is gone, and the just constitution of nature recovered, *pleasure* ceaseth. But the highest *pleasure* of *minds* and *spirits* does not onely consist in the relieving of them from any antecedent pains or grief, or in a relaxation from some former molesting passion: neither is their happiness a mere Stoical ἀταραξία; as the happiness of the Deity is not a mere *negative* thing, rendring it free from all disturbance or molestation, so that it may eternally rest quiet within it self; it does not so much consist in *quiete*, as in *actu & vigore*. A mind and spirit is too full of activity and energy, is too quick and potent a thing to enjoy a full and complete happiness in a mere *cessation*; this were to make

happinefs an heavy spiritless thing. The Philosopher hath well observ'd, that τῷ ἀληθινῷ ἀγαθῷ σύγγενον ἡ ἀληθινὴ ἡδονή, their is infinite power and strength in divine joy, pleasure and *happinefs* commensurate to that Almighty being and goodness which is the eternal source of it.

As created beings, that are capable of conversing with God, stand nearer to God or further off from him, and as they partake more or less of his *likeness*; so they partake more or less of that *happinefs* which flows forth from him, and God communicates himself in different degrees to them. There may be as many degrees of *sanctity* and *perfection*, as there are of states and conditions of creatures: and that is properly *sanctity* which guides and orders all the faculties and actions of any creature in a way suitable and correspondent to that rank and state which God hath placed it in: and while it doth so, it admits no sin or defilement to it self, though yet it may be elevated and advanced higher; and accordingly true positive *sanctity* comes to be advanced higher and higher, as any creature comes more to partake of the life of God, and to be brought into a nearer conjunction with God: and so the *sanctity* and *happinefs* of innocency it self might have been perfected.

Thus we see how true religion carries up the souls of good men above the black regions of *hell* and death. This indeed is the great ἀποκατάστασις of souls, it is *religion* it self, or a real participation of God and his holiness, which is their true *restitution* and advancement. All that *happinefs* which good men shall be made partakers of, as it cannot be born up upon any other

other foundation then *true goodness and a godlike nature* within them; so neither is it distinct from it. *Sin* and *hell* are so twined and twisted up together, that if the power of *sin* be once dissolved, the bonds of death and hell will also fall asunder. *Sin* and *hell* are of the same kind, of the same lineage, and descent: as on the other side true *holiness* or religion and true *happiness* are but two several notions of one thing, rather then distinct in themselves. *Religion* delivers us from *hell* by instating us in a possession of true life and blifs. *Hell* is rather a nature then a place: and *heaven* cannot be so truly defined by any thing *without* us, as by something that is *within* us.

Thus have we done with those particulars wherein we considered *the excellency and nobleness of religion*, which is here exprest by *the way of life*, and elsewhere is stiled by *Solomon a tree of life*: true religion being an inward principle of life, of a divine life, the best life, that which is *life* most properly so called: accordingly in the holy scripture a life of religion is stiled *life*, as a life of sin and wickedness is stiled *death*. In the ancient academical philosophy it was much disputed whether that *corporeal and animal life*, which was always drawing down the soul into terrene and material things, was not more properly to be stiled *death* then *life*. What sense hereof the *Pythagoreans* had may appear by this practice of theirs, they were wont to set up *κεκολληται* empty coffins in the places of those that had forsaken their school and degenerated from their philosophy and good precepts, as being apostates from
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life it self, and dead to virtue and a good life, which is *the true life*, and therefore fit only to be reckoned among *the dead*.

For a conclusion of this discourse; the *use* which we shall make of all shall be this, to awaken and exhort every one to a serious minding of religion: as *Solomon* doth earnestly exhort every one to seek after true *wisdom*, which is the same with *religion* and holiness, as *sin* is with *folly*; *Prov. 4. 5. Get wisdom, get understanding*; and *v. 7. Get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding. Wisdom is the principal thing.* This is the sum of all, *the conclusion of the whole matter, fear God, and keep his commandments*; for *this is the whole* (duty, business and concernment) *of man.* Let us not trifle away our time and opportunities which God hath given us, wherein we may lay hold upon life and immortality, in doing nothing, or else pursuing hell and death. Let us awake out of our vain dreams; wisdom calls upon us, and offers us the hidden treasures of life and blessedness: let us not perpetually deliver over our selves to laziness and slumbering. Say not, *there is a lion in the way*; say not, though religion be good, yet it is unattainable: no, but let us intend all our powers in a serious resolv'd pursuance of it, and depend upon the assistance of heaven which never fails those that soberly seek for it. It is indeed the levity of mens spirits, their heedlessness and regardlessness of their own lives, that betrays them to sin and death. It is the general practice of men *αὐτοχεδιάζειν τὸν βίον*, *extempore vivere*, as the satyrist speaks; they ordinarily ponderate and deliber-

liberate upon every thing more then how it becomes them to live, they so live as if their bodies had swallowed up their souls: their lives are but a kind of lottery: the principles by which they are guided are nothing else but a confused multitude of fancies rudely jumbled together. Such is the life of most men, it is but a meer *casual* thing acted over at peradventure, without any fair and calm debates held either with religion, or with reason which in it self, as it is now distorted and depraved by corrupt men, is a true Friend to religion, and directs men to God and to things good and just, pure, lovely and praise-worthy; and the directions of this inward guide we are not to neglect. Unreasonableness or the smothering and extinguishing *the candle of the Lord* within us is no piece of religion, nor advantageous to it: that certainly will not raise men up to God, which sinks them below men. There had never been such an *apostacy from religion*, nor had such a mystery of iniquity (full of deceivableness and imposture) been revealed and wrought so powerfully in the souls of some men, had there not first come an *apostacy from sober reason*, had there not first been a falling away and departure from natural truth.

It is to be feared our nice speculations about *a tò ép' hūm* in theology have tended more to exercise mens wits then to reform their lives, and that they have too much descended into their practice, and have tended rather to take men off from minding religion, then to quicken them up to a diligent seeking after it. Though the powers of nature may now be weakned, and
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though we cannot produce a living form of religion in our own souls; yet we are not surely resolved so into a sluggish *passiveness*, as that we cannot, or were not in any kind or manner of way to seek after it. Certainly a man may as well read *the Scriptures* as study a piece of *Aristotle*, or of natural philosophy or mathematics. He that can observe any thing comely and commendable, or unworthy and base, in another man, may also reflect upon himself, and see how *face answers to face*, as *Solomon* speaks *Proverbs* 27. 19. If men would seriously commune with their hearts, their own consciences would tell them plainly, that they might avoid and omit more evil than they do, and that they might do more good then they do: and that they do not put forth that power which God hath given them, nor faithfully use those talents nor improve the advantages and means afforded them.

I fear the ground of most mens misery will prove to be a *second fall*, and a *lapse upon a lapse*. I doubt God will not allow that proverb, *the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the childrens teeth are set on edge*, as not in respect of *temporal misery*, much less will he allow it in respect of *eternal*. It will not be so much because our first parents incurred Gods displeasure, as because we have neglected what might have been done by us afterwards in order to the seeking of God, his face and favour, while he might be found.

Up then and be doing; and the Lord will be with us. He will not leave us nor forsake us, if we seriously set our selves about the work. Let us endeavour to acquaint our selves with
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our own lives, and the true rules of life, with this which *Solomon* here calls *the way of life*: let us inform our minds as much as may be in the excellency and loveliness of practical religion; that beholding it in its own beauty and amiableness, we may the more sincerely close with it. As there would need nothing else to deter and affright men from *sin* but its own ugliness and deformity, were it presented to a naked view and seen as it is: so nothing would more effectually commend religion to the minds of men, then the displaying and unfolding the excellencies of its nature, then the true native beauty and inward lustre of religion it self: ὅ ἑσπερος, ὅ ἑως ἔτι δαυμασός· neither the evening nor the morning-star could so sensibly commend themselves to our bodily eyes, and delight them with their shining beauties, as true religion, which is an undefiled beam of the uncreated light, would to a mind capable of conversing with it. Religion, which is the true wisdom, is (as the author of the book of wisdom speaks of wisdom,) *a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty, the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirrour of the power of God, and the image of his goodness: she is more beautifull then the sun, and above all the order of stars; being compared with the light, she is found before it.*

Religion is no such austere, sour and rigid thing, as to affright men away from it: no, but those that are acquainted with the power of it, find it to be altogether sweet and amiable. An holy soul sees so much of the glory of religion in the lively impressions which it bears upon it

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self, as both woes and wins it. We may truly say concerning religion to such souls as *S. Paul* spake to the Corinthians, *needs it any epistles of commendation to you?* Needs it any thing to court your affections? *Ye are indeed its epistle, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God.*

Religion is not like the prophet's roll, sweet as honey when it was in his mouth, but as bitter as gall in his belly. Religion is no sullen *Stoicisme*, no sour *Pharisaisme*; it does not consist in a few melancholy passions, in some dejected looks or depressions of mind: but it consists in *freedom, love, peace, life, and power*; the more it comes to be digested into our lives, the more sweet and lovely we shall find it to be. Those spots and wrinkles which corrupt minds think they see in the face of religion, are indeed nowhere else but in their own deformed and misshapen apprehensions. It is no wonder when a defiled fancy comes to be the glass, if you have an unlovely reflection. Let us therefore labour to purge our own souls from all worldly pollutions; let us breath after the aid and assistance of the divine spirit, that it may irradiate and enlighten our minds, that we may be able to see divine things in a divine light: let us endeavour to live more in a real practice of those rules of religious and holy living commended to us by our ever-blessed Lord and Saviour: so shall we know religion better, and knowing it love it, and loving it be still more and more ambitiously pursuing after it, till we come to a full attainment of it, and therein of our own perfection and everlasting bliss. **II PE 69**

THE END

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